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Doctoral Program Completion: Grit, Goal-Setting, Social Support

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**DOCTORAL PROGRAM COMPLETION:
GRIT, GOAL-SETTING, SOCIAL SUPPORT**

BY

VALERIE BLANCHARD

Dissertation Committee

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**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Seton Hall University
2018**

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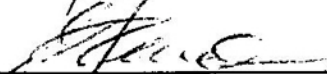
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Valerie L. Blanchard, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ph.D.** during this **Spring Semester 2018**.

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Abstract

A problem in academia exists regarding the length of time it takes doctoral students to finish their program. More doctoral students are enrolled in a doctoral program than ever before, however, graduation rates have not been increasing at the same rate as student enrollment. Of those students who do graduate from their doctoral program, approximately 50% of students who start do not finish. Research tells us common reasons why doctoral students withdraw, but there is a critical need for research about best practices of how doctoral students persevere through to completion. Less is known about the successful practices of doctoral graduates who complete their degree in a timely manner. Even at the doctoral level, programs are not immune from the problems of student attrition and extended times for completion.

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of grit, methods of goal-setting, and the social support networks of 15 EdD graduates and 18 PhD graduates who completed their doctorate at one institution of higher education. EdD graduates completed their doctorate in a cohort program and PhD graduates completed their doctorate in a traditional program. The qualitative study utilized grounded theory methodology to answer the research questions through a semi-structured, in depth, interview.

The findings of this study suggest that grit, goal setting, and social support all play an important role in doctoral completion for both EdD and PhD students. To endure the intense educational process, a doctoral degree requires students to sustain their focus and persist in challenging situations (grit). All participants set difficult, attainable goals, tracked them, and accomplished their mission to complete their doctorate. Social support was influential for both EdD and PhD graduates, and participants experienced social support on different levels. Most EdD graduates looked towards their cohort for social support, and PhD graduates turned more to

their family or friends. Participants in this study utilized goal-setting techniques and relied on social support to help get them through the transition from structured coursework to open-ended research.

Keywords: grit, goal-setting, social support, doctoral completion, attrition

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believe that I can get to the finish line too. Thank you for generously giving of your time, trust, and honesty.

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my husband, Ben. Your support and unwavering ability to keep everything in perspective inspired me and grounded me. You were my relentless champion and an invaluable proofreader. Thank you for your endless support and constant motivation. Our journey together continues to show true grit!

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Earning a doctoral degree is the highest level of education one can receive. The dedication to the degree is immense and requires grit. Although the time between entering graduate school and earning the doctorate has slightly decreased in the field of education over the past 20 years, (Survey of Earned Doctorates [SED], 2017), on average it still takes a doctoral student about a decade to finish their program entirely. In 2016 the average time to degree in the field of education from graduate school to doctoral completion was 11.7 years, and on average, 6 of those years were dedicated to their doctoral program (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2017). Even at the doctoral level, programs are not immune from the problems of student attrition and extended times for completion. A decade is a lengthy time for one to dedicate oneself to research with the temptation to stray away and drop out of their program. Of those students who do graduate from their lengthy doctoral program, approximately 50% of students who start do not finish (Council of Graduate Schools, 2017). Every doctoral student represents a substantial investment in terms of time, intellectual resources, and public and private dollars (Council of Graduate Schools, 2015). "Low Ph.D. production rates ... put the existence of doctoral programs (and the faculty who teach them) at risk" (Lovitts, 2001, p. 3). Gilliam and Kritsonis (2006) suggest that, "higher education must be committed to the success of its doctoral students, who collectively represent a stronghold on the nation's progress and superiority" (p. 3). Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, financial support, selectivity of program, and student age are some factors that are linked to doctoral completion (Attiyeh, 1999). Reasons for

doctoral drop-out include student frustration with academic policies, frustration with advisers, and alienating departmental climates (Haworth, 1996).

Recent Trends

According to the most recent Survey of Earned Doctorates (2017), the number of doctorates awarded in education has declined over the past decade, leading to a large, steady drop in the relative share of doctorates in this field from 13.4% in 2006 to 9.4% in 2016. However, applications for admissions increased for doctoral programs in the education field (3.0%) between fall 2015 and fall 2016 (Council of Graduate Schools, 2017). The increase in enrollments may indicate a rising pressure for Americans to attain higher education as the economy changes (Kazis, 2006). A progressive relationship exists between increasing education and higher median earnings. In fact, individuals who hold doctoral degrees have higher median earnings and lower unemployment rates than those with master's degrees (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Thus, those with doctoral degrees earn more and are less likely to be unemployed than those who did not pursue additional education past the undergraduate or master's degree.

Although overall doctoral degree attainment is at an all-time high (National Science Foundation, 2017), it would seem logical that the growth of advanced degrees would not be a concern. However, graduation rates have not been increasing at the same rate as student enrollment (Council of Graduate Schools, 2015). Research reflects a more complicated scenario. An article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Cassuto, 2013) stated that the current PhD attrition rate is approximately 50%, which equates to one out of every two students who start a PhD program leaves prior to completion. In 2016 the total doctoral graduation rate was 54,904 (SED, 2017). If the average time to completion after graduate school for all fields is about 6 years, then we can look at 2010 and see that only 134,218 applications were accepted in

doctoral programs (out of 597,669 applicants), according to the Council of Graduate Schools (2011). More than half of the students that started a doctoral program did not finish. This ongoing trend is detrimental.

According to a report, *The College Payoff* (2011), put out by Georgetown University, “Those holding bachelor's degrees earn about \$2.27 million over their lifetime, while those with masters, doctoral, and professional degrees earn \$2.67 million, \$3.25 million, and \$3.65 million, respectively” (Carnevale, Rose & Cheah, 2011. p.1). *The College Payoff* more specifically states, “Across all industries, on average, women have to attain a PhD to earn more in their lifetimes (\$2.86 million) than men who have only attained a bachelor's degree (\$2.60 million)” (p.1).

Statement of the Problem

A problem in academia exists regarding the length of time it takes doctoral students to finish their program. Even though universities are producing more doctorates every year with 54,904 doctoral degrees awarded from all fields in 2016 (an average annual growth of 3.3%), according to the SED (2017), a decline in graduation rates exists in the field of education. In the past two decades, a steady collapse has caused a drop from 16% in 1996 to 9% in 2016 (SED, 2017). This problem negatively impacts doctoral candidates and universities because it leaves the doctoral candidate depressed, embarrassed, anguished, and unaccomplished (Lovitts, 2001). A lack of successful doctoral graduates can also leave universities with a poor graduation track record, which could reflect negatively upon the faculty, compounded by wasted time and finances associated with the program costs (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Tinto, 1993). Student graduation rate is seen as an indicator of the effectiveness of a program or institution of higher education, and it is significant to understand the basic reasoning underlying its importance (Stover, 2005).

The Council of Graduate Schools (2015) calls for a global approach to limit attrition. That approach begins with thoughtful admissions practices which emphasize "fit" between student and program and extends through assessment, advisement, and financial support (Cassuto, 2013).

The question that universities should be seeking is: What are those who are finishing their doctoral degree in a timely manner doing different than those who remain ABD or those that never finish? Schools need to stop turning their heads and throwing their hands up and take a deeper dive into this academic epidemic.

Is it the level of grit, or knowing that one can advance their intellectual potential through growth-mindset? Research suggests that individual student internal traits may contribute to student success. According to Duckworth, Gendler, and Gross (2014), grit depends on having focused, long-term passions and that people who can set long-term goals and stick to them have a leg up on success in school and life. By taking an individualistic approach, it may be possible that an internal trait like grit is predictive of student success amongst doctoral students.

Is it setting realistic goals that are obtainable and effective towards the doctoral candidate's end in mind? "Research supports predictions that the most effective performance seems to result when goals are specific and challenging, when they are used to evaluate performance and linked to feedback on results, and create commitment and acceptance," according to Lunenburg (2011, p.5).

Is it surrounding oneself with a social network that is supportive and aware of the backing needed for the individual to reach the finish line? Jairam and Kahl (2012) reported, "Social support as a stress mediator has been explored in a number of contexts, but research is somewhat limited regarding doctoral students" (p.313). To prevent stress excess during the

journey of doctoral research, social support can aid in avoiding stress by interceding throughout the stress assessment step or emotional response to stress (Jairam & Kahl, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of grit, methods of goal-setting, and the social support networks of Executive EdD graduates and Education, Leadership, Management, and Policy (ELMP) PhD graduates who have completed their doctoral degree from a specific university. Since approximately half of all doctoral students withdraw from their program (National Science Foundation, 2017), common factors may exist for those students who persevere to complete their doctoral degree. In this research, the goal was to determine if grit, goal-setting, and social support played a role in student success at a specific university. Understanding the roles of grit, goal-setting, and social support may suggest a new way for higher education administrators to view their students' academic performance and persistence through graduation. Common predictors of doctoral student success have traditionally been studied, such as gender, race, GRE scores, and grade point average (Chang, 2014), but I examined if universities need to take a different approach to determine what truly forecasts doctoral student success over that of other traditional predictors.

Doctoral student success is obtained when a doctoral candidate successfully defends his or her oral dissertation. Students that are actively working on their dissertation are unofficially considered all but dissertation (ABD). In this research, students that graduated from the Executive EdD program and the ELMP PhD program were both surveyed and interviewed. Through interview responses and survey results of doctoral graduates I sought to understand if grit, goal-setting, and social support had an impact on the student's academic life to graduate.

The purpose of this study was to understand if (a) grit was a factor to the graduates during their doctoral program, (b) goal-setting was intrinsic to the graduates during their doctoral

program, (c) social support was influential to the graduates during their doctoral program, and if (d) the transition from a class setting to an independent setting during the dissertation process affected the time it took to graduate from their doctoral program.

Research Questions

The following research questions framed the research project:

1. What role does grit play, if any, in doctoral completion of students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?
2. Is goal-setting intrinsic to doctoral completion of students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?
3. Is social support influential in the completion of a doctoral degree for students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?
4. Does the transition from a class setting to an independent work environment during the dissertation process affect the time it takes to graduate from a doctoral program for students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?

Significance of the Study

It is pertinent to ascertain the characteristics and habits of doctoral graduates to further our understanding of factors that increase the achievement of the doctoral degree. Previous studies have established that poor advisement, loss of interest in degree attainment, and lifestyle mismatch are to blame for student attrition (Morrison, 2014). Given these previously identified factors, it was important to determine whether student attrition is an outcome of poor advisement and lack of institutional support or a result of the individual student's choices and decisions. It was

significant to learn whether the reason of student attrition is solely the student's responsibility or the blame of outside circumstances. As Duckworth stated in her 2014 TED Talk,

We need to shift away from blaming teachers, class size, lack of money, family conditions, and other "situational" factors, which, while important, have increasingly over the past century let the student off the hook and turned underperformers into victims of circumstance rather than creators of opportunity.

Understanding the roles of grit, goal-setting, and social support may suggest a new way for higher education administrators to view their students' academic performance and persistence through to graduation. Common predictors of doctoral student success have traditionally been studied, such as gender, race, GRE scores, and grade point average (Chang, 2014), but I examined if universities would benefit from a different approach to determine what forecasts doctoral student success over other traditional predictors. For instance, research suggests that grit may be as essential as other measures of intelligence to high achievement and success in life (Chang, 2014). Examples of individual grit, which have been shown to be predictors of success include: student retention in the West Point cadet-training program, higher GPAs amongst undergraduates, higher education attainment among adults, and further progress in the Scripps Spelling Bee (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Regarding goal-setting, Tinto's (1975, 1987) student integration model and Bean's (1990) student attrition model both incorporated motivation as a significant predictor of a student's intent to stay or leave college (Cardona, 2013). Bair and Haworth (1999) reported that motivation and goal setting were reported to be strongly related to doctoral degree completion. Bauer (1997) investigated goal setting for doctoral candidates and whether the students who set goals were more likely to finish their dissertation within a standard period (5 - 7 years) than students who did not set goals. Findings

indicated that goal-setting had a direct relationship to timely completion of the dissertation (Cardona, 2013). Higher education studies also suggest that perfectionism and procrastination are related to motivation, and that both may be viewed as expressions of control stemming from deficits in self-esteem of doctoral students affecting their progress towards degree completion (Cardona, 2013; Gardner, 2007; Lovitts, 2005). Lastly, empirical research suggests doctoral student attrition is linked to stress (Lovitts, 2001) and feelings of social isolation (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Hawley, 2003; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004), and social support can help to reduce stress and feelings of social isolation for doctoral students (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Hadjioannou, et al., 2007).

A gap in the literature exists regarding the significance of grit, goal-setting, and social support, when used in tandem. The literature provides examples of how grit, goal-setting, and social support have each aided doctoral students in degree completion, but they have only been studied individually. No researcher has studied the impact that all three (grit, goal-setting, social support) have on a doctoral student's degree completion when successfully applied in unison. A possible outcome of this research will help to determine if grit, goal setting, and social support, when used collectively, have an impact on the completion of the doctoral dissertation, and thus lead to the earning of the doctoral degree.

Definition of Terms and Abbreviations

- *All but dissertation (ABD)* is a description of a student who has finished coursework and passed comprehensive exams but has yet to complete and defend the doctoral thesis (Schuman, 2014).

- *Dissertation* is a formal writing requirement often an original contribution to knowledge and research – for a doctoral degree (Glossary of United States Educational Terminology, 2018).
- *Doctoral candidate* is a student who usually advances to doctoral candidate once he or she has completed all coursework required for the degree and has passed the doctoral comprehensive exam. As a doctoral candidate, the student's final task is to complete the dissertation (S. Swinger, personal communication, February 27, 2017).
- *Doctoral degree* is the highest award a student can earn for graduate study. The doctor's degree classification includes such degrees as Doctor of Education, Doctor of Juridical Science, Doctor of Public Health, and the Doctor of Philosophy degree in any field such as agronomy, food technology, education, engineering, public administration, ophthalmology, or radiology (Integrated Postsecondary Data System, 2016).
- *Doctor of Education (EdD)* a degree that is oriented toward candidates pursuing leadership roles in education, government agencies, and nonprofits. This degree is also designed for candidates in the business world who are responsible for improving organizations through teaching and learning (Teach.com, 2016).
- *Goal-setting theory* refers to the process of identifying something that you want to accomplish and establishing measurable goals and timeframes. When you decide on a financial change to save more money and then set a certain amount to save each month, this is an example of goal-setting (Locke & Latham, 2002).
- *Grit* is the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007).

- *Retention* is a measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. For all other institutions this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall (Integrated Postsecondary Data System, 2016).
- *Social Support* is the degree to which a person's basic social needs are fulfilled by interacting with others. Social support systems can be composed of individuals and/or groups. Social support systems may provide affection, sympathy, acceptance, esteem from others, advice, information, and help with work responsibilities (Kaplan, Cassel, and Gore (1977); Thoits (1982).
- *Social support network* is composed of several individuals within one's environment who influence one's perceptions of his or her environment and might include family members, friends, and co-workers (Kelly, 2005).
- *Student attrition* is the departure from all forms of higher education prior to completion of a degree or other credential (Johnson, 2012).
- *Time to degree*: The median time elapsed from the start of any graduate school program to completion of the doctoral degree. In addition to this measure, a second measure of time to degree is also reported in the data tables: median time elapsed from completion of the bachelor's degree to completion of the doctorate (SED, 2017).

Limitations of the Study

This study sought to understand only the experience of a sample of doctoral students at a mid-sized private university in northeastern United States. Accessibility to doctoral graduates was limited to the willingness and availability of the program's staff and students. It was also unknown the number of doctoral graduates who would volunteer to participate in this study. Responses from the study were based on trusting that the graduates would respond to my questions honestly and to the best of their ability to receive accurate data.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study sought to understand whether grit, goal-setting, and social support played major roles in the doctoral candidate's academic life to reach graduation. I begin this review of the literature with a brief discussion on doctoral education and its value. I then discuss doctoral student attrition and its impact on students and the university and then I turn the focus on the grit factor and how it may relate to doctoral student graduation. Next, I review the literature regarding goal-setting theory of motivation, originally developed by Locke and Latham in the 1960s and then updated by Locke and Latham in 2002. In relation to goal-setting, this section ends with a literature review pertaining to the work by Dr. Stephen Covey (1989), specifically his work on the seven habits of highly effective people. The final two sections review the literature as it pertains to social support for successful doctoral completion. To complement the literature review of doctoral student social support, the literature review concludes with doctoral cohorts and types of social support centers that universities offer to their doctoral students. This may help to understand better if the social support centers make a difference in doctoral graduation rates.

Doctoral Education and its Value

Doctoral students are among the best and brightest students, whose goal is to earn the highest academic degree awarded by universities. Doctoral students work their way through coursework, qualifier and comprehensive exams, and the daunting dissertation phase that ends with the grand finale of the oral defense. The PhD was first awarded in the U.S. in 1861 at Yale University to Eugene Schuyler, Arthur Williams Wright, and James Morris Whiton (Rosenberg, 1961). One hundred fifty-seven years later, 2.5 million people (2%) currently hold a doctoral

degree in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau, 2015). This may sound like a lot, especially when the dropout rate for doctoral students is more than 50% (SED, 2017) and earning a doctoral degree takes twice as long as earning a bachelor's degree (8.8 years; SED, 2017), but PhD holders produce the highest wages and the lowest unemployment rates (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2016).

However, the value of the PhD is increasing. It is required in some positions outside academia, such as research jobs at major international agencies. Alikhan (2013) states, "If having a master's degree at the minimum is *de rigueur* in Washington's foreign policy world, it is no wonder many are starting to feel that the PhD is a necessary escalation, another case of costly signaling to potential employers" (p.1). An article on the Australian public service states, "Credentialism in the public service is seeing a dramatic increase in the number of graduate positions going to PhD's, and master's degrees [are] becoming the base entry level qualification" (Hare, 2014, p.1).

A difference does exist between the EdD and the PhD. Both are similar in requirements, but the PhD emphasizes more theoretical research. "Educational PhD programs emphasize the development of educational theory through research that generates new, or reformulates existing, knowledge" (All Education Schools, 2017, p.1). The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) states, "The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession" (CPED, 2014, p.1). According to Teach.com (2016), the Doctor of Education (EdD) is geared toward those looking to work in leadership roles in public and private education, as well as positions in government agencies, nonprofits and education administration. Additionally, businesses are increasingly recognizing that chief learning officers

or chief academic officers are integral in driving improvements in their organizations. The purpose of the EdD for the field of practice is to prepare leaders to improve educational practice (Townsend, 2002). In addition to P–12 settings, individuals also seek to attain the EdD for higher education administrative positions, such as use in community college settings, and therefore will help individuals become an effective or more effective educational leader (Townsend, 2002).

A key component of improving school performance is “providing current and future school leaders with the knowledge and skills they need to educate our children better and to help them succeed,” according to school administrator leadership expert, Dr. Charles Mojowski (Mojowski, 1993, p.35). “It is not just teacher expertise in discrete subject matter that is important, but also better management skills, values, habits, and experiences among school administrators, which breed a positive learning culture and lead to student success” (Mojowski, 1993, p.35). These findings connect accountability, student performance, and finance with administrator preparation. Current or aspiring principals and administrators who want to stand out in the job field and gain a more comprehensive understanding of policy making might consider going for an EdD (Learn.org, 2016).

Paul Shaker (2005) is the Dean of Education at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, and he stated,

As a public-school-oriented dean of education, I have had the privilege of working with numerous school leaders on a regular basis in five states and three nations. Many succeed without doctoral study, but my perception is that such advanced study, when achieved, greatly benefits them in the same ways that it benefits leaders in higher education: It gives them a superior background in theory; an ability to evaluate, apply,

and direct research; and an increase in the respect and attention of society. Advanced credentials have also paved the way for women and members of minority groups to assume leadership roles, by helping to overcome societal biases (p.1).

Roland Barth, who created the principals' leadership component of the Harvard Graduate School of Education curriculum, stated in 1990 that a "lack of specific knowledge about the skills principals need to be effective leaders exists at a time when principals face dramatic change in their roles" (Barth, 1990, p.99). Research by Sharon Powell of the Princeton Leadership Training Institute, reported in *Building Capacity from Within*, (Powell & Ross, 2003) revealed "these demands for change in administrative roles and functions have not come solely from reformers and researchers. Practicing administrators themselves have repeatedly noted personal needs to develop a new set of knowledge and skills for effectiveness as leaders in education today" (p.91).

In the past 20 years, accountability in higher education has increased and resulted in an interest in evaluating the effectiveness of doctoral education by measuring desired educational outcomes and identifying factors that promote those outcomes (Anderson & Anderson, 2013). Organizations such as the Council of Graduate Schools, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation have undertaken projects aimed at improving educational effectiveness of doctoral education (Anderson, Cutright, & Anderson, 2013). Results in research demonstrate that students' interactions with faculty mentors and peers in supportive yet challenging environments along with developmentally meaningful and authentic learning experiences are considered critical to the effective preparation of the next generation of scholars, researchers, and educators (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchins, 2007).

Doctoral Student Attrition and Its Effects

Disparagement of doctoral education exists, regardless of its distinction. Complications such as high attrition, lengthy time-to-degree, and poor professional preparation persist as long-term concerns (Anderson et al., 2013). Attrition is the dwindling in numbers of students resulting from lower student retention (Hagedorn, 2004). The word attrition makes faculty, students, and institutions cringe. The effects of attrition include the reduction of graduate schools' completion numbers, faculty and departments lose their recognition of their doctoral graduates, and students lose invested money and time that they will never get back. "Attrition carries the taint of loss, failure, and despair," according to Cassuto (2013, p.1).

Historically, the attrition rate of doctoral students has been 40% to 50% (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000; National Research Council, 1996; Smallwood, 2004), and full-time doctoral student's average time-to-degree is a discouraging 6–8 years, and that is for the students who manage to finish at all. "This phenomenon of doctoral persistence and its converse, attrition, is most puzzling given that ironically, the most academically capable and successful, most stringently evaluated, and most carefully selected students in the entire higher education system, doctoral students, are the least likely to complete their chosen academic goals," (Golde, 2000, p.199). The number of doctorates awarded since the launch of the Survey of Earned Doctorates in 1958, indicates an average annual growth of 3.3%, marked by declines in 1974–1978 and 2001–2002 (SED, 2017).

Along with dropout rates may come incurred debt for institutions and individuals. According to the Survey of Earned Doctorates (2017), 55% of those age 31–40 and 50% of those age 41 or older hold the highest graduate education debt (\$30,000+). Doctoral education exists,

in part, to meet highly educated individuals' needs for advanced learning opportunities (CGS, 2016). According to Lovitts (2001):

Doctoral coursework is expensive because, by design, it tends to have a much higher teacher-student ratio than undergraduate work and because each doctoral student requires many hours of one-on-one research supervision by a member of the research faculty.

Whether or not a student graduates, each doctoral student represents a substantial investment in terms of time, intellectual resources and public and private dollars.

Furthermore, doctoral students incur financial obligations, and surrender substantial opportunity costs to pursue their degrees. They make a substantial psychological investment since doctoral study presents an incisive challenge to the ego integrity of academically-oriented individuals. Failure to complete can leave individuals with psychological and family turbulence, massive debt and limited career potential (p.3).

Finally, the issue of self-accountability and ownership must be addressed. Placing the dissertation work front and center and dodging temptation is one thing but truly staying the course is another (Tsitas, 2012). Dissertation completion can be interrupted by the stress of everyday life and other distractions, such as new career opportunities that entice students away from their focus (Tsitas, 2012). Doctoral candidates fall into three categories, according to Cassuto (2013),

(1) Those who can't get it done. Perhaps they lack the temperament to work on their own, (2) Those who could finish but choose not to. Some may seek alternative academic careers. Others may try to become entrepreneurs, sailors, or artisans, and, (3) everyone else that is, those who complete their doctorates (p.1).

Grit

Grit is the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). “On average, individuals who are gritty are more self-controlled, but the correlation between these two traits is not perfect: Some individuals are paragons of grit but not self-control, and some exceptionally well-regulated individuals are not especially gritty” (Duckworth et al., 2014, p.1).

Research suggests that grit may be as essential as other measures of intelligence to high achievement and success in life (Chang, 2014). “Grit has been shown to be predictive of several aspects of success ranging from retention in the West Point cadet-training program, higher GPAs amongst undergraduates, higher education attainment among adults, and further progress in the Scripps Spelling Bee” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p.1095). According to Angela Duckworth, “People who can set long-term goals and stick to them have a leg up on success in school and life” (as cited in Perkins-Gough, 2013). Duckworth continued, “Grit is related to resilience because part of what it means to be gritty is to be resilient in the face of failure or adversity” (p.14).

For Duckworth and her team to research grit, they developed a scale to measure it, known as the Grit Scale. Duckworth (2007) explained,

Half the questions relate to responding resiliently to situations of failure and adversity or being a hard worker. The other half of the questionnaire is about having consistent interests, focused passions, over a long time which does not have to do with failure and adversity. It means that one chooses to do a particular thing in life and elects to give up a lot of other things in order to do it. Moreover, one will stick with those interests and

goals over the long term. Grit is not just having resilience in the face of failure, but also having deep commitments that one remains loyal to over many years (p.1089).

West Point utilizes the Whole Candidate Score as a major factor for admissions. The Whole Candidate Score includes SAT scores, class rank, demonstrated leadership skills, and physical ability. Duckworth and her team were curious to find if the grit test would be a better predictor of success than the Whole Candidate Score during the rigorous summer training program. Not every cadet makes it through summer training, which is referred to as Beast Barracks. The research team asked for cadet volunteers to take the grit questionnaire before the summer training began. Once the research team received the completed tests back from 1,218 out of 1,223 cadets they sat back and waited until the end of summer training (Perkins-Gough, 2013). Grit was not related to Whole Candidate Score ($r = -.02, ns$) or any of its components: SAT score ($r = -.05, ns$), high school class rank ($r = -.04, ns$), Leadership Potential Score ($r = .05, ns$), and Physical Aptitude Exam ($r = .01, ns$). As predicted, grit was related to self-control ($r = .63, p < .001$). Grit predicted completion of the rigorous summer training program better than any other predictor (Duckworth et al. 2006). Grittier West Point cadets were less likely to drop out during their first summer of training. Of all the variables measured, grit was the best predictor of which cadets would stay during the first challenging summer. In fact, it was a much better predictor than the Whole Candidate Score, which West Point at that time thought was their best predictor of success. The Whole Candidate Score had no predictive relationship with whether a cadet would drop out that summer (Perkins-Gough, 2013).

Another sample that Duckworth et al. (2007) gathered to test grit was a sample that consisted of 139 Ivy League undergraduates. “Participants completed the Grit Scale and reported additional information, including current GPA, expected year of graduation, gender, and

SAT scores” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p.1090). Student’s GPA were self-reported, and the outcome indicated that grittier adolescents earned higher GPAs and watched less television (Duckworth et al., 2007). “Grit scores were associated with higher GPAs ($r = .25, p < .01$), a relationship that was even stronger when SAT scores were held constant ($r = .34, p < .001$)” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p.1088). Duckworth and her team (2007) found, “Grit was associated with lower SAT scores ($r = -.20, p < .03$), suggesting that among elite undergraduates, smarter students may be slightly less gritty than their peers” (p.1088). Ackerman and Heggestad (1997) found “conscientiousness and IQ to be orthogonal” (p.121). Duckworth et al. (2007) stated:

Results were consistent with that of Moutafi, Furnham, and Paltiel (2005), who found in a large sample of job applicants that conscientiousness and general intelligence were inversely correlated at $r = -.24$. It is possible, as Moutafi et al. have suggested, that among relatively intelligent individuals, those who are less bright than their peers compensate by working harder and with more determination (p.1098).

In Cross’s research (2013) of non-traditional online doctoral students, he found that “Older students exhibited higher grit scores than younger students, and that grittier students, especially women, had higher GPAs than less gritty students. Grittier students also spent, on average, more time per week working on their program of study than less gritty students” (p.107). In comparing student grit scores to GPA, “A small but significant relationship was present. In addition, other significant relationships between grit and age, gender, and self-reported hours worked per week on course work were also found” (Cross, 2013, p. 107). Cross’s study confirmed that grit was related in some ways to non-traditional online doctoral student success. Cross (2013, p. 110) concluded that his study “confirmed what previous authors have

found in relation to grit and age as well as self-motivation and related character traits; namely that they are important for successful doctoral students.”

In 2013, the Fisk-Vanderbilt program aimed to reduce the doctoral student drop-out rate by changing the manner of accepting students into their doctoral program. The Fisk-Vanderbilt program used an entirely different measure for entrance into their science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) doctoral programs by way of a grit test (Powell, 2013). To measure grit, the Fisk-Vanderbilt program developed an interview during which minority applicants described what intrigued them about science, a challenging experience or obstacle, their fears, how they pulled through challenges and the resources or relationships in which they relied academically (Powell, 2013). At least two faculty members scored interviewees’ answers on a grit scale, and the program used that number and the professors’ qualitative assessment of the student’s interview for selection (Powell, 2013). The unconventional approach, which included, “intensive mentoring and eliminating standardized test scores as a criterion for admission, (p.472)” boosted minority numbers in some of the least diverse fields, such as astronomy and physics (Powell, 2013). The successful outcome represents the value of grit and the importance to foresee the true potential of minority students in the Fisk-Vanderbilt STEM program.

In 2007, Duckworth and her team recruited a sample of finalists from the 2005 Scripps National Spelling Bee. This sample completed the grit test prior to the final competition. The outcome of interest in this sample was the final round reached in the National Spelling Bee. The results indicated that grittier National Spelling Bee finalists were more likely to advance to further rounds than were their less gritty competitors, in part because they had accumulated more spelling practice (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Furthermore, these findings support Galton's (1892) contention that there is a qualitative difference between minor and major accomplishments. Galton (1892) suggested, "The inclination to pursue especially challenging aims over months, years, and even decades is distinct from the capacity to resist "the hourly temptations," pursuits which bring momentary pleasure but are immediately regretted" (p.6). According to Duckworth (TED Talk, 2013), "Grit entails having and working assiduously toward a single challenging superordinate goal through thick and thin, on a timescale of years or even decades. Although both self-control and grit entail aligning actions with intentions, they operate in different ways and over different timescales."

Grit is also associated with "optimistic explanatory style (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009) and growth mindset (Galla et al., 2013) cognitive dispositions that incline individuals to look for changeable causes of their current problems" (p.9). This aspect is especially important as it relates to the complex conditions of doctoral student professional and personal experiences during their time in their program. No matter their circumstance, "Gritty individuals tend to follow through on their commitments" (Duckworth et al., 2007, p.1098). "We need to take our best ideas, our strongest intuitions, and we need to test them. We need to measure if we have been successful, and we have to be willing to fail, to be wrong, to start over again with lessons learned" (TED Talk, 2013).

In 2013 a report from the U.S. Department of Education put out a 126-page study based on promoting grit, tenacity, and perseverance (Dabbar, 2014). The report emphasized that these were critical factors for success moving forward in education, and these factors are being backed by organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, University of Chicago, The National Science Foundation, UC Berkeley and Stanford (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Managing chaos and change are significant components to student success, and colleges are

beginning to seek students that can acclimate and thrive in a changing environment detected by the results of a grit test (Dabbar, 2014).

Motivational psychologist Heidi Grant, PhD (2011) said that studies show that gritty people obtain more education in their lifetime. In her post, *Nine Things Successful People Do Differently*, Grant said that successful people reach their goals not simply because of who they are, but more often because of what they do. She wrote, “Grit is a willingness to commit to long-term goals, and to persist in the face of difficulty” (Tsitas 2012, p.1).

By taking an individualistic approach, it may be possible that an internal trait like grit is predictive of student success amongst doctoral students. According to Duckworth et al. (2014), “Grit entails having and working assiduously toward a single challenging superordinate goal through thick and thin, on a timescale of years or even decades” (p.202). Thus, grittier people persevere, which may determine who succeeds and who fails.

Growth Mindset

In the 1990s people were told to tell everyone how smart and wonderful they were to boost their self-esteem. It was a movement that intended to motivate people to enhance their success, but unfortunately, the theory flopped and led to the acceptance of mediocrity (Dweck, 2015). People were no longer challenged, and they turned away from anything that required effort because they feared they would not look smart (Dweck, 2015). Dweck wanted to learn more about this personality trait, especially when she knew that people who are “no more talented or able were embracing challenges and thriving in the face of failure,” which led to the discovery of the mindsets.

Dr. Carol Dweck created the terms *fixed mindset* and *growth mindset* to define the fundamental beliefs people have about learning and intelligence (Mindset Works, 2015). A fixed

mindset is when a person believes he or she is born with a certain number of fixed traits and talent and that is it. Having a growth mindset is the belief that your abilities can be developed (France, 2016). “When people believe they can get smarter, they understand that effort makes them stronger. Therefore, they put in extra time and effort, and that leads to higher achievement” (Mindset Works, 2015, p.1). “In a fixed mindset people will feel humiliated if they fail or are rejected, and in a growth mindset people believe talent and abilities can be developed through hard work, good strategies, and good mentoring and coaching from others” (France, 2016, p.1). It is common to occasionally feel disappointment with a growth mindset, but these are healthy reactions that permit a person to push on, be productive, and develop (France, 2016). A growth mindset means that a person relishes in learning, embrace challenges, sticks to their goals, and experiences fulfillment when improving. Since success is a result of the growth mindset, every time one pushes through a challenging task, neurons in the brain form new connections, and the individual becomes smarter (France, 2016).

Recent advances in neuroscience have proved that the brain is much more malleable than was thought before (Mindset Works, 2015, p.1). “Neuroscientific discoveries have shown that we can increase our neural growth by the actions we take, such as using good strategies, asking questions, practicing, and following good nutrition and sleep habits” (Mindset Works, 2015). This finding led researchers to understand the link between mindsets and achievement. Thus, interventions and studies have proved we can indeed change a person’s mindset from fixed to growth, and when we do, it leads to increased motivation and achievement (Mindset Works, 2015). Dweck (2006) cited a poll of 143 creativity researchers who concurred that the number-one trait underpinning creative achievement is exactly the type of resilience and fail-forward perseverance attributed to the growth mindset (Popova, 2014).

Growth mindset and fixed mindset is a spectrum, and everyone is made up of both (Dweck, 2015). Since fixed mindset and growth mindset is so dynamic, individuals must understand what triggers a fixed mindset to improve their growth mindset. When new challenges arise, a setback occurs, or one receives criticism, one should not react in a defensive or hasty manner (fixed mindset). Rather, he or she can turn that emotion around and feel inspired and eager to fix mistakes to correct them (growth mindset; Dweck, 2015).

In summary, growth mindset is based on the belief that one's basic abilities can be nurtured through his or her own determination. Dweck (2006) discovered that growth mindset creates a passion for learning rather than a hunger for approval. Human qualities such as intelligence and creativity can be cultivated through effort and deliberate practice (Dweck, 2006). Individuals with a growth mindset are not discouraged by failure, nor do they consider themselves as failing; rather, they see themselves as learning (Popova, 2014). When doctoral students with a growth mindset receives criticism and feedback from their adviser, they will not throw their hands in the air and say they are done; they forge through, ask questions, read more, do further research, learn from their mistakes, and as a result they grow as students, as individuals.

Goal-Setting Theory of Motivation

The term *goal* is defined by goal setting theory as the object or aim of an action (Locke & Latham, 1990). According to Locke and Latham (2002),

A goal is defined simply as what the individual is consciously trying to do. Goals direct attention and action, and challenging goals mobilize energy, lead to higher effort, and increase persistent effort. Goals motivate people to develop strategies that will enable them to perform at the required goal levels. Accomplishing the goal can lead to

satisfaction and further motivation, or frustration and lower motivation if the goal is not accomplished (p.705).

The major finding of goal-setting, which is based on hundreds of studies, is that individuals who are provided with specific, difficult but attainable goals perform better than those given easy, nonspecific, or no goals at all (Lunenburg, 2011). Coinciding with this finding, the individuals must have ample capability, accept the goals, and accept feedback related to performance (Latham, 2003). According to Latham and Locke (2002):

The 1990 theory of goal setting developed from studies involving close to 40,000 participants in eight countries performing 88 different tasks in laboratory and field settings, using experimental and correlational designs, over a time span of one minute to three years where the goal was assigned, self-set, or set participatory with an individual or group is this: (1) a specific, high goal leads to a higher performance than no goal, or an abstract goal such as do your best, (2) there is a linear relationship between the difficulty level of the goal and job performance, (3) performance feedback, participation in decision making, and competition only affect performance to the extent that they lead to the setting of a specific, high goal (p.705).

One of the variables that moderates the goal-performance relationship is commitment. Locke and Latham (1990, p. 124) stated, “It is virtually axiomatic that a goal that a person is not really trying for is not really a goal and cannot have much effect on subsequent action.” Commitment is a broader term than goal acceptance in that it refers to one’s attachment to or determination to attain the goal, regardless of its source (Latham & Locke, 2002). The causes of commitment fall into two broad categories: factors that make goal attainment important and factors that make an individual confident that the goal can be attained. Factors that were found

to affect an individual's desire to attain a specific, high goal include authority, peers, making the goal public, incentives, internal rewards, punishment, and instrumentality (Latham & Locke, 2002).

Bair and Haworth (1999) reported that motivation and goal-setting were reported to be strongly related to doctoral degree completion. Bauer (1997) investigated goal setting for doctoral candidates and whether the students who set goals were more likely to finish their dissertation within a standard period (5–7 years) than students who did not set goals. Findings indicated that goal-setting has a direct relationship to timely completion of the dissertation (Cardona, 2013). In addition, “Tinto's (1975, 1987) Student Integration Model and Bean's (1990) Student Attrition Model included motivation as an important predictor of a student's intent to stay or leave college” (Cardona, 2013, p.15).

Goal setting is the underlying explanation for all major theories of work motivation—whether that is Vroom's (1994), Maslow's (1970) or Herzberg's (2009) motivation theories, Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, or operant-based behaviorism (Skinner, 1979). Regarding peer influence, Matsui, Kakuyama, and Onglatco (1987) found that commitment was higher for participants working in dyads who were assigned both group and individual goals rather than just the latter (Lunenburg, 2011). Mueller (1983) tested the hypothesis that competitiveness increases performance only if it leads to the setting of a specific, high goal. Lastly, goal intensity, the amount of thought or mental effort that goes into setting a specific, high goal, affects commitment to it (Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, & Ratajczak, 1990, p.8).

Higher education studies suggest that perfectionism and procrastination are related to motivation, and that both may be viewed as expressions of control stemming from deficits in self-esteem of doctoral students affecting their progress towards degree completion (Cardona,

2013; Gardner, 2007; Lovitts, 2005). Procrastination is defined as the "tendency to put off doing something until a future date unnecessarily" (Gagne, 2005, p 47). Previous research on frequency and cognitive-behavior factors related to procrastination suggests that from one-fourth to nearly all doctoral students experience problems with procrastination (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984), and that the issue is worsened the longer students are enrolled in a doctoral program (Golde & Dore, 2001; Cardona, 2013). Additionally, procrastination has been found to have negative academic consequences related to less motivation to complete the doctoral degree (Austin, 2002; Cardona, 2013; Gardner, 2009).

“Research supports predictions that the most effective performance seems to result when goals are specific and challenging, when they are used to evaluate performance and linked to feedback on results, and create commitment and acceptance” (Lunenburg, 2011, p.1). Latham and Locke updated their theory in 2013 and confirmed their results: “The motivational impact of goals may be affected by moderators such as ability and self-efficacy. Deadlines improve the effectiveness of goals, a learning goal orientation leads to higher performance than a performance goal orientation, and group goal-setting is as important as individual goal-setting.”

7 Habits of Highly Effective People

According to Covey (2009), goal setting motivation is often the most challenging element of making change in our lives:

We do not feel motivated, or we feel like every time we make an attempt it turns into a failure. This failure causes individuals to look at goals in a very wrong way. Goals are important and there is great power that comes from setting and achieving goals (p.1).

It is significant to understand Covey’s concept of goal-setting through the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, which may immensely benefit doctoral students that are working on their

dissertation to get them to graduation. In Dr. Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), Covey explains how each habit is imperative to living an overall effective life.

According to Covey (1989), Habit 1, *Be Proactive*, means that, "Proactive people use their resourcefulness and initiative to find solutions rather than just reporting problems and waiting for other people to solve them" (p.75). When people are proactive they choose to make a promise and keep it and set a goal to achieve it. Making and keeping commitments instills awareness and self-control. To be proactive is a concept especially important for doctoral students to stay the course. By making small commitments and sticking to them, they will be more successful. Understanding that they need to stay within their circle of influence will keep doctoral students productive and can help steer them on the path of research and writing. Being a proactive doctoral student means taking initiative, setting goals, and pushing through no matter the circumstances.

Dweck's research about mindset is comparable with many of Covey's principles about being proactive (Dweck, 2006). "A review of the supporting literature about each concept reveals that proactivity and a growth mindset require a similar frame of mind that motivates individuals to take greater responsibility for personal progress" (Franklin Covey, 2015, p.2). Habit 2, *Begin with the End in Mind*, means, "to know where you are going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction" (Covey, 1989). For a doctoral student, it means knowing when deadlines are, taking the research step-by-step, and having a realistic goal to reach within a genuine time frame. Effectiveness is not contingent exclusively on how much effort we lay out but on whether the effort we use is in the precise state. A goal-setting example of practicing Habit 2 is weekly planning. Covey

(1989) stated, “Many of us live our lives...so consumed with reacting to today that we neglect to see the big picture. The big picture is what is ultimately important- our mission, our vision, and our priorities” (p.93).

A concept that is widely used in the business world that coincides with Begin with the End in Mind is S.M.A.R.T: Specific (S), Measurable (M), Agreed (A), Realistic (R), Timed (T). S.M.A.R.T goal setting creates structure into goals and objectives (Your Coach, 2017). Shives (2015) suggested no matter the degree one is pursuing there are common themes in making consistent progress within academia. Shives (2015) continued, the three most basic themes are, “(1) How does one identify important goals? (2) How does one then set realistic goals? (3) How does one track their progress to achieve their major goals?”

A study done by Gail Matthews at Dominican University consisted of 267 participants from a wide variety of business organizations and networking groups throughout the United States and overseas (Feinstein, 2014). The study focused on how goal achievement in the workplace is influenced by writing goals, committing to goal-directed actions, and accountability, as described in the second habit. Matthews discovered that those who wrote down their goals accomplished significantly more than those who did not write down their goals (Feinstein, 2014).

Next, effective management is *Putting First Things First*, which is Habit 3. “Management is discipline, carrying it out” (Covey, 1989, p.157). Covey created the time matrix chart to explain this concept which consists of four quadrants and it is how one spends their time: (Q1) important-urgent, (Q2) not important-urgent, (Q3) important-not urgent, and (Q4) not important-not urgent.

Covey (1989) stated that Quadrant 2 is the heart of effective personal management and it deals with things that are not urgent but are important. “It [Q2] deals with things like building relationships, long-range planning, preventative maintenance, preparation, and all those things we know we need to do but somehow seldom get around to doing because they are not urgent” (Covey, 1989, p.159).

In Habit 4, *Think Win-Win*, Covey (1989) explained,

Win-win means agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial, mutually satisfying.

With a win-win solution, all parties feel good about the decision, and feel committed to the action plan. Effective interpersonal leadership requires the vision, the proactive initiative and the security, guidance, wisdom, and power that come from principle-centered personal leadership. It makes a person accountable to perform and evaluate the results and provides consequences as a natural result of performance (p.218).

For doctoral students to think win-win they must be open to feedback and collaboration when available. When working with advisers it is important for the doctoral student to work at their highest level of maturity and be open to accept their adviser’s feedback to develop an even better plan than the adviser and student had individually. Covey’s win-win philosophy is founded on principles like Mary Parker Follett’s early work in conflict resolution. Follett’s integrated approach forms the basis of what is now commonly referred to as “win-win” (Tonn, 2003).

Follett taught that there are three main ways of dealing with conflict: domination, which creates a win-lose scenario; compromise, where both parties settle; and integrated, where a solution has been found in which both desires have found a place. The first two methods result in a scenario where one party sacrifices something to the benefit of the other. Follett explains that both are unsatisfactory because “conflict will come up again and again in some other form” since “we

give up part of our desire” (Graham, 2003, p.5). Integrated, on the other hand, like Habit 4, encourages people to look for win-win solutions that are mutually agreeable (Covey, 2014).

Habit 5, *Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood*, focuses on listening rather than reacting to understand and honor others’ perspectives and realities. It also means to communicate our own views in a way that is both open and respectful (Covey, 1989). The Greek philosophy of Ethos (one’s personal credibility), Pathos (empathic side), and Logos (reasoning side) gives the sequence for effective communication. Most people go straight to the logical side without first establishing their character and building the relationship. This is an essential habit for doctoral students to follow when they are creating their dissertation proposal, a process that can be highly frustrating. Practicing the habit to “seek first to understand then to be understood” can take the student through the writing of the proposal in a methodical way. “Seek first to understand, then to be understood” seeks to develop interdependent skills through empathic listening (listening with the intent to understand, not to respond). Covey explains that communication is life’s most important skill and that through empathic listening we can really come to understand another’s perspective (Covey, 2013). Studies show that effective listening improves students’ educational success. A report published in the *Review of Educational Research* (Thompson & Leintz, 2004) analyzed 107 master’s theses and 128 doctoral dissertations regarding listening. “There is a high positive relationship between school achievement and listening ability” (p.225). They went on to say that effective listening positively impacted creativity, relationships, learning, and reading comprehension (Thompson & Leintz, 2004).

Synergize is Habit 6 and can best be described as creative cooperation. The skills for creative cooperation are achieved through cooperative learning. The habit is about educating

students in cooperative learning techniques like peer mentoring, to work well with others, teamwork, be humble, respect others, and value other people's strengths; Covey describes it as "two heads are better than one" (Covey, 2013, p.275).

In a study published by the American Educational Research Association, researchers Johnson and Johnson (2009) stated that more than 1,200 studies have been conducted on the advantages of cooperative learning. The literature explains that cooperation "tends to promote greater long-term retention, higher intrinsic motivation and expectations for success, more creative thinking, greater transfer of learning, and more positive attitudes toward the task and school." Johnson and Johnson (2009) continue, "Although many teaching procedures have been recommended over the past 60 years, very few are still around. Almost none are as widespread and institutionalized into instructional practices as is cooperative learning" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Habit 7 is *Sharpen the Saw*, and it is the habit of renewal. Sharpen the Saw, according to Covey (1989) means:

Having a balanced program for self-renewal in the four areas of your life: physical, social/emotional, mental, and spiritual. As you renew yourself in each of the four areas, you create growth and change in your life. You increase your capacity to produce and handle the challenges around you. Without this renewal, the body becomes weak, the mind mechanical, the emotions raw, the spirit insensitive, and the person selfish. Living a life in balance means taking the necessary time to renew yourself (p.301).

Jonathan Erwin wrote about his version of Sharpening the Saw in his book, *Inspiring the Best in Students* (2012). Erwin explained the importance of developing five dimensions: physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual, make up the "whole human being." He

stated that when we address the social and emotional dimensions of a student, we concurrently improve the physical and intellectual dimensions (Erwin, 2012). In addition, in a 2004 study of 46 organizations that implemented the 7 Habits, the return on investment in the 7 Habits training averaged around 173%. Another study of 15 organizations across 6 industries discovered a sampling of the performance improvements organizations typically see in their employees after learning the 7 Habits (Franklin Covey, 2004). Prior to the 7 Habits training, 26% stated they focused on organizational goals, and after the 7 Habits training 76% said they focused on organizational goals. In addition, 50% more people stated they developed stronger interpersonal relationships after the 7 Habits training (Franklin Covey, 2004).

In 1997, California University of Pennsylvania (CAL U) began a series of training sessions in Franklin Covey's 7 Habits course on individual and organizational effectiveness. Faculty, staff, and students received training by Franklin Covey consultants or certified in-house trainers for 6 years. Approximately 450 people on campus had completed the 7 Habits course. In 2004, doctoral candidate Joyce A. Hanley launched a study to determine what effect, if any, the 7 Habits principles were having on individuals and the CAL U campus culture. Specifically, she wanted to know if the faculty, staff, and students were able to perceive individual changes as well as changes in campus life because of 7 Habits training.

Hanley (2004) organized to have members of the CAL U faculty, as well as administrators, staff, and students, take a 42-question Impact Analysis survey designed to assess perceived change. Hanley wanted to determine if respondents felt that, as a result of the 7 Habits training, they had changed behavior with respect to: (1) being proactive instead of reactive, (2) being more goal-directed, (3) prioritizing work, (4) valuing and incorporating the views of others, (5) being effective listeners, (6) being supportive team players, and (7) regularly

renewing oneself. In addition, Hanley also investigated perceived change in three other characteristics that were taught as part of the 7 Habits training: competence, character, and trust. Competence was defined as perceptions of consistently producing high-quality work, character as perceptions of using language and behavior that encouraged others, and trust as the perception of being able to trust top management while feeling free to give feedback.

The core finding held across all the demographic categories was that male and female respondents reported statistically significant perceptions of positive change because of 7 Habits training. Hanley also discovered “a statistically significant perception of positive change by individuals” (p.2) for each of the behaviors taught in the 7 Habits as well as for the traits of character and competence.

In conclusion, much of the success literature today tends to value independence, encouraging people to become liberated and “do their own thing.” The reality is that people are interdependent, and the independent model is not optimal for use in an interdependent environment that requires leaders and team players (Covey, 2013). The practice of the 7 Habits may be useful for doctoral students since it helps to provide the regimented life-style necessary when working on a doctoral dissertation.

Social Support for Doctorate Degree Completion

The existing research advocates that social support is a significant resource for doctoral students, and that doctoral student attrition is linked to stress (Lovitts, 2001) and feelings of social isolation (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Hawley, 2003; Lewis et al., 2004). Social support can help to reduce stress and feelings of social isolation for doctoral students (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Hadjioannou, et al., 2007). “A social support network is comprised of several individuals within one’s environment who influence one’s perceptions of his or her environment and might include

family members, friends, and co-workers” (Kelly, 2005, p.57). “Social support can take various forms, including emotional support (attempts to alleviate negative affects), professional support (mentoring and guidance), and practical support (money or help with task completion)” (Jairam & Kahl, 2012, p.317). “Social connections with fellow students, faculty members, and their superiors are important for doctoral students,” (Ali & Kohun, 2006) since, “social isolation is often exacerbated by being in a new, unfamiliar, and stressful environment, all of which are traits common to doctoral programs” (Ali & Kohun, 2006, p.24). Feelings of social isolation stem from confusion about program expectations and miscommunication (or a lack of communication) with their peers and faculty (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Lovitts, 2001).

Additional research took a more generalized approach. For example, Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) surveyed 166 graduate students from various disciplines. Participants completed two social support assessments (i.e., Family Environment Support and Graduate Program Support) and two stress assessments (i.e., Stressful Life Events and Psychological Stress Symptoms). Findings indicated that gender differences exist about social support and stress for graduate students. More specifically, female graduate students experience less familial social support and more stress, while male students experience more familial social support and less stress. Castro, Damon, Jaggars, Rutner, & Tancheva (2011) also studied women’s experiences as doctoral students. They determined that female doctoral students benefitted from individual characteristics such as “intrinsic motivation, independence, resolve, perseverance, and motivating self” (p. 69). Their findings revealed that negative external factors can serve as positive motivation as well.

Other research expanded upon Mallinckrodt and Leong’s (1992) study and included more doctoral students from a greater variety of disciplines. Hodgson and Simoni (1995) polled 566

doctoral students from various programs including humanities, social sciences, life sciences, and physical science. Participants answered questions about their financial status and completed two stress surveys (i.e., Graduate Life Events Scale and the Graduate Student Stress Survey) and a social support survey (i.e., Graduate Social Support Scale). Findings indicated the following: a) there is a negative relationship between reported social support and stress and b) female doctoral students experience less support and more stress than male doctoral students. Lee (2009) surveyed individuals who had successfully completed a doctoral degree and were faculty members. Participants described the negative aspects of their doctoral experience. For example, they used descriptors like difficult, stressful, frustrating, and exhausting and described their time spent as lonely, painful, and frightening. Some participants reported that it was “almost impossible” to balance the roles of academic career and doctoral student. Lee’s findings also uncovered the influences that improved and diminished from the respondents’ doctoral experience. Among the positive factors were family support, involvement with other students, and a constructive relationship with other faculty. The factors that detracted from their experience included multiple life responsibilities, financial issues, and difficulties with faculty and advisers.

Jairam and Kahl’s (2012) qualitative study focused on individuals with an earned doctoral degree and asked the participants to describe the behaviors from their social support network that both helped and hindered their degree completion.

In Lee’s (2009) study, the results showed that there were positive and negative levels of social support, but specifically, Jairam and Kahl (2012) categorized three distinct types of positive social support: emotional, practical, and professional. Doctoral students that experienced positive social support felt that it greatly aided in their doctoral degree success.

Emotional support is defined as an individual's attempts to alleviate negative affect in another person and shows caring for another person (Heller & Rook, 1997; House, 1981). Examples of emotional support include active listening, empathy, and showing concern (Nelson & Brice, 2008). Participants also discussed that their academic friends acted as cheerleaders, encouraging them to attain higher goals. Several discussed the fact that their academic friends "cheered for my individual successes professionally, such as publications" (p.71). Others noted that their academic friends celebrated and supported each other as they met writing deadlines for publications, comprehensive exams, and dissertations. Participants mentioned that an integral part of their successful completion of their doctoral programs was the socializing and fun activities that they engaged in with their academic friends. Many participants discussed the need for group activities, such as going out to eat, meeting at each other's homes, socializing over drinks on the weekends, going bowling, or simply getting together to talk. Responses indicated that the enjoyment and fun they received through interaction with academic friends are a necessary part of coping with the rigors of a doctoral education. Practical support, also labeled tangible support (Schaefer et al., 1981), included gifts, financial support, and taking care of chores for someone else. Practical support was important for doctoral students because it had been shown to act as a buffer against depression and negative morale (Schaefer et al., 1981). Participants indicated that their families provided financial support, assistance with housework, time and space to do work, and assistance with children. Professional support is defined as providing feedback, advice, and assistance in solving specific professional problems (Rosenholtz, 1989; Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Regardless of the time of the advisers' entrance into the doctoral students' social support system, participants indicated that their advisers'

expertise and knowledge were instrumental in their successful completion, especially in the writing of the dissertation (Jairam & Kahl, 2012).

However, some participants in Jairam and Kahl's (2012) study experienced negative social support and participants stated that it hindered their academic progress. One issue the participants negatively experienced was competition among their academic peers which intensified their anxiety levels and prompted a negative effect and impacted their performance. Participants also responded that some family members did not understand why the doctoral student was pursuing their doctoral degree, and feelings of jealousy, misunderstanding, and frustration were ubiquitous amongst families. Respondents reported that faculty members often do not initiate interpersonal relationships with doctoral students. Additionally, faculty often behaved inappropriately by openly debating, imposing values, and communicating in a threatening manner with doctoral students. Respondents felt that such confrontational behavior by faculty created difficult working relationships and made doctoral students feel that they had to become wary of these distractions, which took focus away from their academic work.

The studies reviewed above on social support demonstrate the significance of social support for doctoral students towards successful degree completion. Results suggest two main findings: First, doctoral students' social support networks were typically composed of their adviser, family members, and peers (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). Second, compared to students with less social support, students with more social support reported less stress, health problems, and emotional problems, and (perhaps subsequently) better success rates (Goplerud, 1980; Hodgson & Simoni, 1995; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

Doctoral Student Transition into the Independent Work Zone

Over the past decade, numerous large-scale projects have studied the topic of doctoral student retention, including the Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project (Council of Graduate Schools 2008), the Graduate Education Initiative funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (Ehrenberg, Zuckerman, Groen & Brucker, 2009), and the National Research Council Assessment of Research Doctoral Programs (NRC, 2010). These studies are complemented by others: The National Science Foundation tracks the number of degrees awarded in its annual *Survey of Earned Doctorates* (SED) and produces other reports such as *Time to Degree of U.S. Research Doctorate Recipients Report* (Hoffer & Welch, 2006).

The lonely and unstructured practice of working on a dissertation may be the utmost contributing influence on doctoral student retention or drop-out (Gardner, 2009; Sigafus, 1998). Social isolation plays a role in the transition as the learning process changes from a dependent participant learner in the coursework stage to an independent and isolated learner in the all but dissertation phase (Jimenez, et. al., 2011). Sigafus (1998) suggested that students miss the contact with colleagues during the dissertation phase and need intellectual and faculty interactions (Jimenez, et. al., 2011). Although students may pass their qualifying exams, they still struggle to write the dissertation (Jimenez, et. al., 2011; Sigafus, 1998).

Ali and Kohun (2007) and other researchers before them (Thoits, 1986) examined social isolation in doctoral programs and concluded that a resolution to doctoral student isolation is to create opportunities to cultivate social relationships and social support (Jimenez et al., 2011). “They challenge doctoral programs to view social isolation as an institutional or administrative matter, not an individual issue. In short, institutions can remedy this problem by enabling students to establish social networks with peers and other key figures in the program” (Ali and

Kohun, 2007). In a supportive environment, students feel integrated, which increases their persistence (Golde, 1998). Similarly, Nerad (1983) found that in those departments where faculty treated students as junior colleagues and participated in social and academic activities, time to degree was shorter. “These findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive and cooperative departmental climate with opportunities for institutional and peer support” (Jimenez et al., 2011).

Furthermore, with doctoral student retention being such a concerning academic epidemic, it is important to find out what, if anything, institutions are doing to address this issue to support working, professional doctoral students. In the fall of 2014, the Doctoral Support Center (DSC) for Writing & Research Excellence (DSC-TTU, 2017) at Texas Tech University’s College of Education (TTU-COE) created an innovative solution to address the burgeoning demands of academic writing support for doctoral students (DSC-TTU, 2017). The primary goal of the DSC was to assist students in the successful attainment of their doctoral degree. The DSC offers support to their EdD and PhD doctoral students online and face-to-face with academic writing tasks leading up to the dissertation that includes assignments for coursework, proposals for human research protection, dissertation proposals, and dissertations (DSC-TTU, 2017). The DSC also provides motivational support for students through activities such as writing workshops and rallies. Essentially, the DSC provides "wrap-around" support for students from start to finish in their doctoral programs (DSC-TTU, 2017).

The Doctoral Support Center (DSC) at the University of Southern California provides EdD and PhD students in the Rossier School of Education with support on the writing of their dissertations, proposals, and course papers (DSC-USC, 2017). The areas of support include: improvement of academic writing skills; conceptualization, development, and editing of the

dissertation; and non-cognitive challenges such as time management. The programs take the form of lectures, workshops, or social events, and doctoral students are also able to make an appointment at the DSC to receive individual help with their papers or dissertations (DSC-USC, 2017). The University of Southern California surveyed doctoral students that have utilized the DSC's services and discovered that out of 69 participants who responded to a questionnaire item about the DSC, 73% identified their experience with the DSC as either excellent or good (Jimenez et al., 2011). When asked what aspects of the DSC services they enjoyed, 55% of the students indicated that they found the technical support they received very helpful, while 41% indicated that they found both the DSC's technical and the emotional support very helpful (Jimenez et al., 2011). In terms of technical support, students benefitted from the one-on-one assistance with writing their class papers and dissertations, preparation support for proposal and dissertation defenses, and attending writing workshops (Jimenez et al., 2011). In addition to the on-campus center, the University of Southern California also offers a dissertation writing retreat called Operation Dissertation Acceleration (ODA). ODA requires students to apply and pay for a four-day retreat at an off-campus site with a goal of making significant progress on writing the dissertation (Jimenez et al., 2011). One of the participants said, "I went to most of the workshops at DSC, but the most helpful was when the workshop took me off campus and assigned me an advisor to help us work without distractions and with consistent goal settings." One student asserted that ODA "saved my life to get over 80% to 90% of my dissertation writing work done" (p.310). Even though the kind of support received by students was often technical in nature, it often translated into emotional support for students (Jimenez et al., 2011). One student noted, "I am plugging along and if it were not for the DSC I would just be depressed and

slacking. They have kept me going, and I will complete this process thanks to their assistance,” (Jimenez et al., 2011, p.312).

Fundamental to students’ transition from the dependent to the independent structure of a doctoral dissertation is developing social networks and accessing supportive institutional programs such as workshops (Ali & Kohun, 2006). Workshops provide opportunities for students to share their research, identify common themes, and offer mutual support and constructive criticism from different disciplinary perspectives (Jimenez et al., 2011). This type of exchange allows students to gain a new perspective on their own proposals and establish a basis for more interchanges and even collaborative projects (Jimenez et al., 2011).

Doctoral program format, such as cohorts, can also counter doctoral student isolation (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000). In some programs, doctoral cohorts include a group of students who enter and begin their program at the same time (Jimenez et al., 2011). Some doctoral cohort groups in education are fast-paced and cater to the part-time student, full-time employee. Classes may be long and intense and take place during the week, over the summer, and on the weekends throughout the year. The cohort creates a sense of community for fellow doctoral students and the accessibility of the dissertation adviser is usually frequent and readily available.

Conclusion

The literature review examined doctoral education and its value, doctoral student attrition and its effects, grit, growth mindset, goal-setting theory of motivation, the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, social support for doctorate degree completion, and support structures and services for doctoral students. First, the literature review concentrated on doctoral education and its value. Having an EdD and PhD provides the degree holder with a superior background in theory; an ability to evaluate, apply, and direct research; and an increase in the respect and

attention of society. In addition, “Advanced credentials have paved the way for women and members of minority groups to assume leadership roles, by helping to overcome societal biases” (Shaker, 2005, p.1).

Next, doctoral student attrition and its impact on students and the university was examined. Student retention was discussed to acknowledge the wide-spread epidemic in academia. For PhD students, the average time to complete a doctorate program is 7 to 8 years or 13 years in some cases (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992), and the average drop-out rate is near or above 50% (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Council of Graduate Schools, 2017). For EdD students the rate of completion varies depending on the institution and program format; Bair and Haworth (1999) place the completion rate for professional doctoral programs between 40 and 60%, similar to PhD completion rates. The dropout rates of doctoral students highlight the importance of identifying the challenges students face (Jimenez et al., 2011).

Examination of the grit factor supports the framework of the research to discover alternative factors to doctoral student retention. According to Chang (2014), behaviors of gritty individuals include:

being obsessed with an idea or project, maintaining focus on a project over a period of time, completing tasks, and being diligent. On the other hand, less gritty individuals include behaviors such as becoming distracted by new ideas and projects, getting discouraged by setbacks, setting a goal but later choosing a different one, and having difficulty maintaining focus on long-term projects (p.46).

Grit complements growth mindset. Carol Dweck’s findings around growth mindset tell us that growth mindset is based on the belief that one’s basic abilities can be nurtured through one’s determination. Although people may differ in various ways, it is possible to adjust and

develop through application and experience (Popova, 2014). Individuals who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies, and input from others) have a growth mindset. They tend to achieve more than those with a more fixed mindset (those who believe their talents are innate gifts). This is because they worry less about looking smart, and they put more energy into learning (Dweck, 2016).

To support the goal-setting theory of motivation for doctoral students, the major finding of goal setting, which is based on hundreds of studies, is that individuals who are provided with specific, difficult but attainable goals perform better than those given easy, nonspecific, or no goals at all (Lunenburg, 2011). Also, individuals must have ample capability, accept the goals, and accept feedback related to performance (Latham, 2003). “Research supports predictions that the most effective performance seems to result when goals are specific and challenging, when they are used to evaluate performance and are linked to feedback on results, and create commitment and acceptance” (Lunenburg, 2011, p.5). Latham and Locke updated their theory in 2013 and confirmed their results: “The motivational impact of goals may be affected by moderators such as ability and self-efficacy. Deadlines improve the effectiveness of goals, a learning goal orientation leads to higher performance than a performance goal orientation, and group goal-setting is as important as individual goal-setting” (p.440).

One way to set goals and live an effective life is by practicing the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People introduced by Dr. Stephen Covey. The 7 Habits teaches us that, “knowledge, skill, and desire are all within our control. We can work on any one [area] to improve the balance of the three” (Covey, 1989, p.89). This concept is especially important for doctoral students to stay their path. Understanding that they need to stay within their circle of influence will keep doctoral students productive and can help steer them on the path of research and

writing. Being a proactive doctoral student means taking initiative, setting goals, and pushing through no matter the circumstances.

Next, the literature reviewed social support for doctorate degree completion. It seems to be crucial for doctoral students to receive social support from their family, friends, and university. Research suggest two main findings: (1) Doctoral students' social support networks are typically composed of their adviser, family members, and peers (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008); and (2) compared to students with less social support, students with more social support report less stress, less health problems, less emotional problems, and (perhaps subsequently) better success rates (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). "Social connections with fellow students, faculty members, and their superiors are important for doctoral students" (Ali & Kohun, 2006), since "social isolation is often exacerbated by being in a new, unfamiliar, and stressful environment, all of which are traits common to doctoral programs" (Ali & Kohun, 2006, p.24).

Finally, support structures and services for doctoral students were reviewed. Fundamental to students' transition from the dependent to the independent structure of a doctoral dissertation is developing social networks and accessing supportive institutional programs such as workshops (Ali & Kohun, 2006). Such communities are vital to retention and degree completion. The rationale is practical: The more interactions and social programs a graduate student can attend, the better rounded a student is likely to be. These engagements encourage research collaborations, increase retention rates, and improve relationships with future alumni (Kern-Bowen & Gardner, 2010). Most of the students enrolled in educational doctoral programs work full-time and do not share the same climate of support as full time graduate students.

Thus, it is critical that schools of education provide active academic support for professional students (Jimenez et al., 2011).

One common theme that seems to arise throughout the literature review as it pertains to time to degree for doctoral completion, is students' experiences during the transition of the structured classroom setting to independently working on their dissertation. Throughout students' academic career, they have learned in a group setting. To not have the organization and structure of classroom and syllabus seems to be difficult for most adults. The freedom to work at will and create their own schedule may sound liberating to some, but it seems to be more detrimental since the length of time to graduation is prolonged and drop-out rates are problematic. The next chapter will specify how the research was conducted to resolve this academic epidemic.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

To better understand how graduates completed their doctoral program in a timely manner, I focused my research on the doctoral graduate's level of grit, methods of goal-setting, and types of social support as they pertained to dissertation completion. I designed a qualitative study at a medium-sized doctorate-granting institution in the Northeast to answer the research questions. A total of 33 participants (18 EdD graduates and 15 PhD graduates) provided their perspectives and experiences about their doctoral program through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Participants were doctoral graduates between the ages of 29 and 62 (current age, as opposed to age of when they graduated). The interviews were transcribed and uploaded into NVivo 11, a software program, for analysis. I then coded and analyzed the interviews using grounded theory methodology (GTM). In this chapter, I describe the methodology of the study in detail.

The purpose of this study was to understand if (a) grit was a factor in completing the Executive EdD and the ELMP PhD degree during their doctoral program, (b) goal-setting was intrinsic to the Executive EdD graduates and the ELMP PhD graduates during their doctoral program, (c) social support was influential to the Executive EdD graduates and the ELMP PhD graduates during their doctoral program, and (d) the transition from a class setting to an independent setting during the dissertation process affected the time it took to graduate from the Executive EdD program and the ELMP PhD program.

Design

Through qualitative methods I was able to gain an understanding of how doctoral graduates persisted in a rigorous educational program. Interviews helped me to understand the struggles and victories that the doctoral graduates endured and how they persevered. A

grounded theory methodology (GTM) approach guided this research study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). According to Creswell (2009), grounded theory is “a qualitative strategy of inquiry in which the research derives a general, abstract theory of process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (pp. 13 & 229). This process involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationships of categories of information (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). In keeping with a grounded theory research design, I collected the data through survey and interview for each participant, and then I analyzed the data to uncover themes.

In this study it was my intention to understand the doctoral graduates’ perspectives and experiences as they related to successful completion of a doctoral program. Qualitative research permits the researcher to comprehend and to interpret discoveries in precise situations and settings by probing into deeper motivations and perceptions of the individuals. In this study, I sought to provide a deeper understanding of how doctoral graduates persevered during their program and to identify the techniques they used to complete their program.

Participants

Sample. The sample for this study was made up of doctoral graduates from two programs at a private midsized university located in the Northeast. The criteria for subject selection required that the participant graduated from their doctoral program between 2007 and 2017. My reasoning for choosing the PhD and EdD programs was to compare the two formats of doctoral programs at this certain university (traditional vs. cohort; PhD vs. EdD). The participants in this study ranged in ages from 29 to 62, both male and female, and were derived from different ethnic backgrounds. I interviewed 18 EdD graduates and 15 PhD graduates.

Interview Protocol. First, an IRB approved staff member from the EdD program and the alumni office identified participants who graduated (between 2007 and 2017) from the EdD program and the PhD program respectively. An email was sent to the graduates from those university-approved individuals, which included a participant recruitment letter. In the letter I explained the purpose and significance of the study, the suggested importance of their participation, what was required of a participating subject, and the anticipated length of the interview. Once the doctoral graduate agreed to participate and the consent form was signed, an interview time was determined.

The first step of the interview included the pre-interview survey that collected data on the participant's age, race, ethnicity, career background, academic background, grit, and other pertinent information, which aided in collecting data (see Appendix A). During the pre-interview survey I also administered a grit survey, also known as the Grit-S. Duckworth's website states, "Researchers and educators are welcome to use the scales I have developed for non-commercial purposes." The Grit Survey was designed to assess an individual's persistence and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p.166).

When the pre-interview survey was completed, the interview was conducted. EdD and PhD graduates were asked a series of semi-structured interview questions related to their grit, goal-setting techniques, and the types of social support they received during their doctoral education. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data-gathering tool to allow the participants to guide the outcome of the interview. Questions and probes were used with the intent to provide focus and flexibility during the actual interviews. Last, a debrief statement was provided to the participants at the end of the interview.

Using this approach, various factors towards degree completion unfolded throughout the interview. The interview protocol was designed to elicit responses of the relevant variables that pertain to grit, goal-setting, and social support during participants' time in their doctoral program. The survey and interviews continued until a minimum of 15 Executive EdD graduates and a minimum of 15 ELMP PhD graduates had successfully been surveyed and interviewed. A total of 18 EdD graduates were interviewed since their interview had already been scheduled.

Data Collection

Along with field observations and document analysis, one of the main ways qualitative researchers create and collect data for their research studies is through interviewing (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2006; Seidman, 2006). According to Poggenpoel & Myburgh (2003),

The researcher is the key person in obtaining data from respondents. It is through the researcher's facilitative interaction that a context is created where respondents share rich data regarding their experiences and life world. It is the researcher that facilitates the flow of communication, who identifies cues and it is the researcher that sets respondents at ease (p.320).

Interviews are considered the most suitable technique for exploratory research investigating opinions, values, and motivations (Sarantakos, 2005).

To understand if grit, goal-setting, and social support were factors in the graduates' reasoning for doctoral completion, participants were asked a series of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D) related to their grit, goal-setting techniques, and the types of social support they received during their doctoral education. This semi-structured interview is normally used when the researcher seeks to capture meanings and perspective of program

participants and other subjective information not typically available through other research techniques (Patton, 2002). Interview coding is used to apprehend what is in the interview data, to learn how people make sense of their experiences and act on them. Coding is the first step of data analysis, as it helps to move away from statements to more abstract interpretations of the interview data (Charmaz, 2006).

Interviews maximize the opportunity for more complete and accurate communication of ideas between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data-gathering tool to allow the participants to guide the outcome of the interview. The questions and probes (see Appendix C) were used with the intention of providing both focus and flexibility during the actual interviews (Patton, 2002). Various factors towards degree completion unfolded throughout the interview with the use of this approach. The interview protocol was designed to elicit responses of the relevant variables that pertain to grit, goal-setting, and social support during the participants' time in their doctoral program.

During the pre-interview survey, the participants were asked to take an 8-question grit survey, also known as the Grit-S. The Grit Scale was designed to assess an individual's persistence and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The 8-item Grit Scale (Grit-S) was tested and re-tested and was shown to have strong predictive validity, test and retest stability, and consensual validity (Duckworth and Quinn, 2009). According to Duckworth and Quinn (2009), "...we recommend the Grit-S as an economical measure of perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (p. 175).

The questions for the pre-interview survey and the interview were developed from the literature. According to Castillo (2016),

A researcher wants intentional and necessary interview questions because people have complex experiences that do not unravel neatly before the researcher. Instead, helping participants explain their experiences takes time, careful listening, and intentional follow up. The questions help participants tell their stories one layer at a time, but also need to stay aligned with the purpose of the study (p.812).

To better understand the development of the interview questions, Tables 1 and 2 were created for better understanding.

Table 1

Pre-Interview Survey Protocol Matrix

	<u>Background Information</u>	<u>Research Question 1 (grit)</u>	<u>Research Question 2 (goal-setting)</u>	<u>Research Question 3 (social support)</u>	<u>Research Question 4 (transition)</u>
Pre-Interview Q1	X				
Pre-Interview Q2	X				
Pre-Interview Q3	X				
Pre-Interview Q4	X				
Pre-Interview Q5	X				
Pre-Interview Q6	X				
Pre-Interview Q7	X				
Pre-Interview Q8	X				
Pre-Interview Q9	X				
Pre-Interview Q10	X				
Pre-Interview Q11	X				
Pre-Interview Q12	X				
Pre-Interview Q13	X			X	
Pre-Interview Q14	X	X		X	
Pre-Interview Q15	X	X		X	
Pre-Interview Q16	X	X	X	X	
Pre-Interview Q17	X	X	X	X	
Pre-Interview Q18	X	X	X	X	
Pre-Interview Q19	X	X	X		
Pre-Interview Q20	X	X			
Pre-Interview Q21	X	X			

The pre-interview survey questions, represented in Table 1, were developed to obtain participants' background information to discover themes as it pertained to the participants' grit, goal-setting, and social support during their time as doctoral students. It was important to understand for this research the factors and effects participants' background may have had during their doctoral program. As identified in both Tables 1 and 2, Research Question 1 relates

to grit, Research Question 2 relates to goal-setting, Research Question 3 relates to social support, and Research Question 4 relates to transition of learning environment (from attending classes to working independently). A bold **X** in Table 1 represents that the pre-interview question applied to either the participant's background or related to one of the four research questions. A non-bold X for the same pre-interview question is still relatable to the pre-interview question but not for the main purpose, which is to gain insight about the participant's background.

Table 2 reveals how the research questions correlated with the interview questions. Any question that I felt I would need to reach deeper for further explanation was followed by one or two probe questions (labeled: Probe#, Probe #a, or Probe #b). A bold **X** in Table 2 represents that the interview question or probe pertained to the specific research question. A non-bold X for the same interview question is still relatable to the interview question but not for the purpose to answer the research question. The reason for including non-bold X's was useful for when I gathered themes.

Table 2

Interview Protocol Matrix

	<u>Background Information</u>	<u>Research Question 1 (grit)</u>	<u>Research Question 2 (goal-setting)</u>	<u>Research Question 3 (social support)</u>	<u>Research Question 4 (transition)</u>
Interview Q1		X	X		
Probe 1		X	X		
Interview Q2		X			
Probe 2		X	X	X	
Interview Q3		X			
Probe 3		X			
Interview Q4		X			
Probe 4		X			
Interview Q5			X		
Probe 5		X	X	X	
Interview Q6			X		
Probe 6a		X	X	X	
Probe 6b			X		
Interview Q7			X		
Interview Q8		X	X		
Interview Q9				X	
Probe 9a				X	
Probe 9b		X	X	X	
Interview Q10				X	
Probe 10a				X	
Probe 10b		X	X	X	
Interview Q11				X	
Probe 11a				X	
Probe 11b				X	
Interview Q12					X
Probe 12					X
Interview Q13		X			X
Probe 13a		X	X		X
Probe 13b		X	X		X
Interview Q14					X
Probe 14			X	X	X
Interview Q15				X	X
Probe 15a				X	X
Probe 15b				X	X

The following is a breakdown of the research questions and probes used in this study and how they relate to the literature.

Research Question 1 (grit): What role does grit play, if any, in doctoral completion of students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?

Interview protocol questions (as they relate to RQ1):

1. Why did you pursue a doctoral degree?

- Probe 1: Growing up, did you ever think you would have a doctoral degree?
- 2. Did you have to make any personal sacrifices to complete your doctoral studies?
 - Probe 2: If so, can you identify those sacrifices and explain how you overcame these challenges?
- 3. Did personal or professional obligations interfere with your doctoral studies?
 - Probe 3: If so, can you describe these obligations and explain how you pushed through them?
- 4. At any point in your doctoral studies, did you feel like dropping out or taking a break?
 - Probe 4: If yes, what was the reason and what was your solution?

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to determine if the participants' degree of grit had been influential with their successes in life, including the completion of their doctoral degree. For example, if the participant was completing his or her doctoral program while simultaneously juggling a career or raising children, I could gain insight as to how the participant was able to persevere and manage completion of the degree considering the appreciable outside obligations. It was possible that these participants may have had high levels of grit since the related literature states, "Grit entails having and working assiduously toward a single challenging superordinate goal through thick and thin, on a timescale of years or even decades," (Duckworth et al., 2014, p.200). Further research suggests that the internal traits of individual students may contribute to student success. Grit is contingent on possessing "focused, long-term passions," and individuals who can establish long-standing goals and keep to them are much more likely to be successful in school and life (Duckworth et al., 2014, p.200). By taking an individualistic approach, an internal trait such as grit may be determined to be a predictor of student success amongst doctoral students.

Research Question 2 (goal-setting): Is goal-setting intrinsic to doctoral completion of students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?

Interview protocol questions (as they relate to RQ2):

1. How did you stay motivated to finish your doctorate?
 - Probe 5: Can you describe strategies you used?
2. Was finishing your doctorate a major priority for you?
 - Probe 6a: If yes, how did you manage your personal and career life to ensure you made time to get your doctoral work done?
 - Probe 6b: If no, what other priorities or obligations were more important and why?
3. How did you manage your time to work on your dissertation?
4. What advice would you give a doctoral student struggling to finish their dissertation?

The major finding of goal setting, which is based on hundreds of studies, is that individuals who are provided with specific, difficult but attainable goals perform better than those given easy or nonspecific goals, or no goals at all (Lunenburg, 2011). The individuals must have ample capability, accept the goals, and accept feedback related to performance (Latham, 2003). It was important to better understand the participant's background to determine if goal-setting had been a lifelong routine. Additionally, if the participant set goals, the reasoning behind the decision to do so may be varied. For instance, some individuals came from families in which their parents were well-educated, with admirable careers that required substantial goal-planning to ensure success, while others may have come from families in which their parents struggled to provide necessities, thus instilling a strong desire to succeed and plan

for high levels of goal attainment for the students. When goals are specific and challenging, are used to evaluate performance, are linked to feedback on results, and create commitment and acceptance, they result in effective performance (Lunenburg, 2011).

Research Question 3 (social support): Is social support influential in the completion of a doctoral degree for students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?

Interview protocol questions (as they relate to RQ3):

1. In general, were your family and/or significant other supportive of your pursuit of a doctoral degree?
 - Probe 9a: If yes, how did they show support?
 - Probe 9b: If no, do you feel that their non-support had any effect on your doctoral completion?
2. Did you receive social support from anyone in your doctoral program?
 - Probe 10a: If yes, who did you receive support from and can you describe your experience?
 - Probe 10b: If no, would you have wanted their support and how so?
3. Did you ever attend any sort of dissertation study group, workshop, or writing seminar during the research/writing phase of your dissertation?
 - Probe 11a: If so, describe what you attended and was it helpful?
 - Probe 11b: If no, do you think it would have been helpful to you? Explain.

A social support network is defined by Kelly (2005) as a group of several individuals within one's environment who influence one's perceptions of his or her environment. Since social support has been studied in numerous settings, limited research exists in relation to

doctoral students (Hadjioannou et al., 2007). Since research suggests that a positive social support system helps individuals to accomplish difficult goals, it was important to ascertain if the participants in this study were provided or had access to adequate social support networks during their time in their doctoral programs and whether those networks were comprised of family, friends, and/or co-workers. Various themes developed related to a broader understanding of this issue, which, in turn, led to a deeper understanding regarding the importance of social support for doctoral students.

Research Question 4 (transition): Does the transition from a class setting to an independent work environment during the dissertation process affect the time it takes to graduate from a doctoral program for students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?

Interview protocol questions (as they relate to RQ4):

1. How did you feel about the transition from taking courses in the classroom to working independently on your research?
 - Probe 12: Did you enjoy the freedom of working at your pleasure or would you have preferred a more structured setting?
2. Did your work/study habits remain the same after you started your dissertation?
 - Probe 13a: If no, what changed? Explain.
 - Probe 13b: If yes, what work/study habits were helpful to you?
3. Did you feel that you were adequately prepared to work independently on your dissertation after you passed your comprehensive exam?
 - Probe 14: What recommendations, if any, would you suggest to your program to support students when they begin their dissertation?

4. Did you seek out social support to help you get through your independent work stage during your dissertation research?
- Probe 15a: If so, what type of social support did you experience?
 - Probe 15b: If no, why not?

The literature presented numerous studies on the importance of social support in doctoral programs (Research Question 3) in relation to the transition from classroom learning to independent study (Research Question 4). It is difficult not to discuss the transition process without discussing social support since studies show it is social support that aids in the doctoral student transition. In supportive environments, students feel integrated, which increases their persistence (Golde, 1998). I sought to discover if the participants in this study received social support during their transition phase of dissertation completion. Of note, social support exists in various forms to include workshops, work-study groups, and family support, understanding, and awareness of what is involved in obtaining a doctoral degree.

Data Analysis Processes

A grounded theory research design was used to analyze the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). “Grounded theory provides a deep, rich analysis, allowing a communication situation to be clearly articulated” (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p.19). “The process of grounded theory helps to ensure the equivalent of validity in qualitative research, often called trustworthiness” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.221). Grounded theory research shares the following characteristics with other qualitative methods which correspond to those of this study: focus on everyday life experiences, valuing participants' perspectives, inquiry as interactive process between researcher and respondents, and primarily descriptive and relying on people's words (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

In keeping with a grounded theory research design, I took detailed field notes and analytic memos and recorded every interview over the phone and uploaded the recording into Nvivo 11. This allowed me the opportunity to easily go back and listen to the participant's responses when necessary. I then transcribed each interview immediately after it was complete into Nvivo 11, which formed nodes. The nodes helped me to stay organized and assisted me as I went back and forth to analyze the data. My next step was to analyze the data to uncover themes. First, to understand the connection of the themes, I conducted open coding. For this step, I created a word frequency query and converted it into a word cloud. This allowed me to pull and identify key words and phrases of interest that were said by the participants in their interviews. This is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.21). During the open coding process, memos about the data and emerging concepts were noted to preserve concentration and to provide a development process for the understanding and lucidity of emergent concepts.

Next, I sought to discover if emerging relationships would develop through axial coding. The goal of axial coding is to create a set of categories that can be used to represent the primary emergent theories provided by the data. Specifically, the purpose in this step was to determine the themes that described the doctoral graduate's grit level, modes of goal-setting, and forms of social support. To do this I created a mind map to sort and organize the data. Within the mind map, I tied together relevant responses to interview questions that provided an in-depth perspective from the doctoral graduate's experience. I then created a matrix (Table 1) that included the participant's demographic information and grit score. The matrix helped me to create a more detailed analysis of the data and to compare participants based on grit score, race, marital status, years in doctoral program, weekly work hours, childhood socioeconomic

background, childhood family structure, and parents' education level. The matrix also assisted me to understand the participant's personal life perspectives and assisted me to further the data analysis that correlated with grit, goal-setting, and social support as they related to the completion of the participant's doctorate. For example, I was able to dig deeper in the research to analyze the participants who had high grit scores (4.0 and above), who took a break during their program, or who experienced a significant setback in their personal lives and stayed the course through graduation.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested that one central category would serve as the fundamental category to which all other emergent categories will relate. This led me to the selective coding stage where I was able to identify many issues that were of importance to the respondents and narrow them down into themes. It was my goal to collect data until it reached the point of theoretical permeation, when identified concepts became recurrent in the data, with no new concepts being identified (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To create meaning behind the data and emerging themes, my research questions guided my writing. I broke down the interview questions and probes and created sections based on the research question. I also looked back at the literature and incorporated my findings to enhance my analysis. This technique brought me to the creation of four themes: (1) Got Grit? Passion and Perseverance to Doctoral Completion, (2) Ready, Set, Goal! Goal Setting with the End in Mind, (3) It Takes a Village- The Effect Social Support Has on Doctoral Student Completion, and (4) You're on Your Own Kid: Transition to Dissertation.

Validity

In a qualitative study, the data-gathering instrument is frequently the researcher himself or herself (Brink, 1993). I took many measures to safeguard the validity of participant responses

by ensuring that participants were clear on the nature of the research, what it was that I was studying, and how I would go about collecting data (Brink, 1993). Field and Morse (1985) recommended that the use of a mechanical recording enhances the accuracy of such transcripts. I took detailed notes along with audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of participant responses. During the writing phase in Chapter 4 I made sure to represent the participant to the best of my ability by using their quotes so that their statements are accurate and valid. To ensure reliability, participant responses from the pre-interview survey and interview were reviewed with the participant at the end of the interview to ensure that responses were noted accurately.

In addition, the Grit Scale was utilized during the pre-interview survey. The 8-item scale measures grit based on two subscales in relation to consistency of interest and perseverance of effort (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Each question in the survey assesses one of these two aspects of the variable grit. In six different reliability tests, the Grit-S proved evidence of internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from .70 to .84 (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Nelson, 2016). The instrument was correlated, and validity was proven against the Big Five Model subscale of conscientiousness, and validity was confirmed (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The Grit-S includes Likert-style responses: not at all like me, not much like me, somewhat like me, mostly like me, and very much like me. In order to acquire a grit score, Questions 2, 4, 7, and 8 are assigned the following points: 5 = *Very much like me*, 4 = *Mostly like me*, 3 = *Somewhat like me*, 2 = *Not much like me*, 1 = *Not like me at all*; Questions 1, 3, 5, and 6 are assigned the following points: 1 = *Very much like me*, 2 = *Mostly like me*, 3 = *Somewhat like me*, 4 = *Not much like me*, 5 = *Not like me at all*. The researcher then must add all the points and divide by eight. According to Duckworth and Quinn (2009), the maximum score on the Grit-S scale is 5 (*extremely gritty*), and the lowest score on the scale is 1 (*not at all gritty*). Completion

of this survey took on average 2 to 3 minutes per participant. The Grit Scale was tested and re-tested by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) and was shown to have strong predictive validity, test and retest stability, and consensual validity.

At the end of each interview I asked if the participant would like me to repeat any prior questions or if there was more information they would like to add. This allowed participants to reflect on their responses as they reminisced on their doctoral experiences through commentary. I was able to learn a little more about their experience and sometimes fill in the gaps of their stories by offering time at the end of the interview for an open-ended reflection.

Human Subject Considerations

Confidentiality. Names of participants who participated in this study will remain confidential as identities will not be published in the study findings. To safeguard privacy, the following procedures took place: (a) the raw data were only examined by the researcher and, (b) graduates who completed the interview were de-identified by the researcher before reporting (Cross, 2013). Additionally, all collected data were electronically stored on a USB memory key and will be kept in a locked, secured desk at my home office and stored for 3 years.

Summary

This chapter presented the background and methods that were used in the grounded theory research method. The goal of this study was to determine if grit, goal-setting, and social support were vital for doctoral degree completion. By interviewing Executive EdD graduates and ELMP PhD graduates from two programs at one university, I sought to determine if: grit was a factor in doctoral completion, the types of goal-setting techniques the graduates applied to finish their doctorate, and forms of social support that the doctoral graduates used to help them

through on their journey to graduation. This research sought to discover a better understanding of the criteria needed for doctoral students to complete a doctoral program in a timely manner.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the level of grit, methods of goal-setting, and the social support networks of Executive EdD and ELMP PhD graduates who have completed their doctoral degrees at a medium-sized university in the Northeast. In this chapter, I present findings based on the analysis of semi-structured interview data with 33 doctoral graduates. Four emergent themes were discovered as they relate to grit, goal-setting, social support, and the transition from coursework to dissertation. I also include a snapshot (Table 3) of the study participants' demographic background to become familiar with the participants' childhood demographics in addition to their demographic status during their time in their doctoral program. Throughout this chapter, I share the participants' perspectives to ensure their voices are clear.

Emergent Themes

Four main themes were identified in this study:

1. Got Grit? Passion and Perseverance to Doctoral Completion
2. Ready, Set, Goal! Goal Setting with the End in Mind
3. It Takes a Village: The Effect Social Support Has on Doctoral Student Completion
4. You're on Your Own Kid! Transition to Dissertation

Participants

Eighteen EdD and 15 PhD doctoral graduates participated in this study. Overall, the average grit score of all doctoral graduates was 4.17 (compare that to Duckworth's research of the West Point cadets, 3.78, Duckworth et al., 2007). On average, the participants already had high grit scores (highest capable score is a 5 and labeled extremely gritty), with the highest being

4.9 (PhD graduate) and the lowest being 3.3 (EdD graduate). The average grit score of the EdD graduates was 4.13, and the average score of the PhD graduates was 4.21.

Table 3 describes the demographic information of the participants. Nineteen participants were male, and 14 were female. Twenty-eight participants identified as White, 1 Hispanic, and 4 identified as Black. Twenty-three participants were married during their doctoral program, 8 were single, 1 was divorced, and 1 was widowed. In this study, the average length of years the EdD participants were in their program for 2.8 years from matriculation to graduation, and PhD participants on average took 7.3 years from matriculation to graduation. The average work week for the EdD participants during their doctoral program was 54 hours, and PhD participants on average worked 46.5 hours. All EdD participants were in administrative roles during their doctoral program and explained that their job required extended work hours (board of education meetings, faculty or parent meetings, school events). In the grit section of this chapter, I will further explain my findings on the relationship between the participants' socioeconomic status and parent education level as it compares to their grit score and drive to overcome adversity no matter their circumstance.

Table 3

Demographic Information of Study Participants

Participant	Grit score	Race	Marital Status	Years in doctoral program	Weekly Work Hours	Childhood socioeconomic background	Childhood Family structure	Mother's education level	Father's education level
EdD1A (male)	3.3	White	Married	3	50+	Middle Class	2 parent household	Masters	PhD
EdD2B (female)	3.9	White	Married	3	50-60	Middle Class	2 parent household	Some college	Associates
EdD3K (female)	4.2	Hispanic	Single	3	60-70	Middle Class	2 parent household	Masters	Bachelors
EdD4J (female)	3.9	White	Married	2	50	Middle Class	2 parent household	Masters	Masters
EdD5G (female)	4	White	Married	2	50	Middle Class	2 parent household	Masters	Masters
EdD6O (male)	4.5	White	Married	2	55	Wealthy	2 parent household	Associates	Medical Degree
EdD7T (male)	4.3	White	Married	3	60	Wealthy	2 parent household	Masters	Bachelors
EdD8D (male)	4.5	White	Married	2	70	Middle Class	2 parent household	High School Graduate	High School Graduate
EdD9S (male)	3.7	White	Married	2	50	Middle Class	2 parent household	High School Graduate	High School Drop Out
EdD10C (male)	4.4	White	Single	2	40	Middle Class	2 parent household	High School Graduate	High School Drop Out
EdD11V (female)	4.3	White	Married	3	50-60	Middle Class	Single parent	Bachelors	Masters
EdD12R (male)	4.2	White	Married	2	60	Middle Class	2 parent household	Bachelors	High School Graduate
EdD13L (male)	4.2	White	Married	2	50	Middle Class	2 parent household	Bachelors	Bachelors
EdD14K (female)	4.5	Black	Married	3	40-50	Low Income	Single parent household	Bachelors	Associates
EdD15Y (male)	4.2	White	Married	2	50	Middle Class	2 parent household	Masters	Some college
EdD16E (female)	3.8	White	Single	9	60	Middle Class	2 parent household	Associates	Some college
EdD17H (female)	4.4	Black	Married	2	40-50	Low Income	Single parent household	High School Graduate	Bachelors
EdD18N (male)	4.1	Black	Divorced	3	45-50	Low Income	2 parent household	High School Graduate	High School Graduate
PhD1R (male)	4.4	Black	Married	8	30	Middle Class	2 parent household	Bachelors	High School Graduate
PhD2M (male)	4.7	White	Single	3	40	Middle Class	2 parent household	High School Graduate	Masters
PhD3F (male)	3.8	White	Single	5	45	Middle Class	2 parent household	Associates	High School Graduate
PhD4N (male)	4.9	White	Married	16	60	Middle Class	2 parent household	High School Graduate	High School Drop Out
PhD5E (female)	4.2	White	Married	8	70	Middle Class	Single parent household	High School Graduate	Military & Trade School
PhD6J (male)	4.1	White	Married	6	40-50	Low Income	Single parent household	Associates	Some college
PhD7G (female)	4.4	White	Widowed	6	40-50	Middle Class	2 parent household	High School Graduate	HS graduate
PhD8H (female)	4.3	White	Married	7	50	Wealthy	2 parent household	Medical Degree	Medical Degree
PhD9T (male)	4.2	White	Married	7	40	Middle Class	Single parent household	High School Graduate	Trade School
PhD10K (female)	4	White	Married	4	35	Middle Class	2 parent household	Bachelors	Bachelors
PhD11S (female)	4.1	White	Single	6	40	Middle Class	2 parent household	Some college	College Graduate
PhD12P (male)	4.4	White	Single	12	50	Low Income	Single parent household	High School Graduate	Unknown
PhD13O (male)	4.4	White	Married	5	60	Middle Class	2 parent household	High School Graduate	High School Graduate
PhD14D (male)	3.5	White	Married	5	38	Middle Class	2 parent household	Some college	Bachelors
PhD15A (female)	3.8	White	Single	12	40+	Wealthy	Single parent household	Masters	Doctorate

Four Major Themes

Four themes emerged from my 33 interviews with EdD and PhD graduates. The guided research questions were based on grit, goal-setting, and social support as they relate to doctoral completion. The themes that developed from this study included: (a) Got Grit? Passion and Perseverance to Doctoral Completion, (b) Ready, Set, Goal! Goal Setting with the End in Mind, (c) It Takes a Village- The Effect Social Support Has on Doctoral Student Completion, and (d) You're on Your Own Kid: Transition to Dissertation.

Got Grit? Passion and Perseverance to Doctoral Completion

Earning a doctoral degree is an impressive achievement, but the long, strenuous journey to reach that completion is not often discussed. Only those who have successfully completed their doctorate truly know what it takes to attain the degree. The first theme discussed in this study will reveal the exact reason why the doctoral graduates initially chose to pursue their doctorate, as well as the personal and professional sacrifices that the graduates endured to complete it. The purpose of this section is to understand the graduates' deep-rooted desire to attain their doctorate and to discover the factors that drove them to persist through to completion. By conducting interviews, a grit survey, and collecting demographic backgrounds of the participants, I compared and analyzed the data to form conclusions. The following section reports my findings.

Doctoral Attainment. When asked, "What was the reason that you pursued your doctoral degree?" participants answered in two ways: for career advancement or because achieving a doctoral degree was a personal goal. Those who pursued their doctorate for career advancement specified that the doctorate was required to move up in their career or was beneficial to have for competitive advantage in their field. Participants who attained their

doctorate as a personal goal did so not because it was required for their career, but because it was an achievement they dreamed of years earlier. The average grit score of those whose reasoning was for career advancement was 4.13, and those who wanted their doctorate because it was a personal goal had an average grit score of 4.02. PhD1R pursued his doctorate for career advancement because, “I was trying to secure my future after I got out of education, so it was basically to secure my job as a professor, but also to give me an alternative for when I stopped teaching.” Participant EdD13L similarly pursued his doctorate for career advancement and was encouraged to do so by his colleagues. He had worked under an individual who went through the same doctoral program, and she inspired him to do the same. As he described, “I wanted to be a better administrator and so having a doctoral degree would give me opportunities like becoming a superintendent or maybe someday teaching college.”

EdD12R pursued his doctorate for personal reasons because he defined himself as a “goal-oriented individual who loves challenges.” It was not necessary for EdD12R to obtain a doctorate for his career, but he felt the desire to acquire it. “After successfully working as a school administrator and defining success, I am most fulfilled when I have a goal in front of me. This concept runs across my life.” EdD12R went on to explain, “The dissertation and the doctoral work was the next goal that I set for myself.” Participant EdD6O also decided to go for his doctorate for personal reasons. EdD6O was 25 years old when he finished his bachelor’s degree and “knew I had a long road ahead of me.” He explained that he “jokingly told myself I would get my doctorate by 35 because I thought it was the most unattainable goal. It was just a goal I set for myself that I never thought was possible.” EdD6O’s grit pushed him along through the next 10 years, and he accomplished his doctorate by the time he turned 35. “I just kept marching through getting different degrees, and it just turned out that it happened.” According

to Carol Dweck (2006), grittier people embody a growth mindset and “believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work- brains and talent are just the starting point” (p.4).

EdD14K wanted to get her doctorate for both reasons, career advancement as well as her underlying personal dream to achieve her doctorate. “I wanted to work at the collegiate level at some point in my career, and so I knew that [a doctorate] would benefit me.” In addition, at a young age, EdD14K’s mother told her she had no choice but to go to college. “From the time I was a little girl, my mom drilled in my head that I didn’t have an option of not going to college, but rather how many times I went, and where I went was my option.” EdD14K grew up in a low-income, single-parent household, and has a grit score of 4.5 (out of 5). EdD18N also grew up in a low-income household (4.1 grit score) and faced adversity at school. He described how he conquered barriers to achieve his personal goal of getting a doctorate. Two factors greatly contributed to EdD18N overcoming adversity: motivational encouragement from his mother and feeling discouraged as a student in his youth. He wanted to “prove his teachers wrong” and always had his mother’s support because she told him, “I can be anything I want- a doctor, an astronaut, a lawyer.” EdD18N continued to explain his reasons for doctoral attainment.

There are a couple of instances that drove me to doctoral completion, but all in all I think it was the fact that as a little kid I had teachers that told me that I wasn’t smart, that I wasn’t a good reader, and I wasn’t a good writer. And there was a little bit of me that believed that as a kid. I knew that I had to work hard, and I think that earning that doctorate was one of those things that said to me that I am smart. Not that I needed a sheet of paper to prove that, or a title, but it was to me, almost a culmination of “yeah, I am smart” and I can accomplish great things. Finishing my doctorate was a personal goal

for me and now I can be a role model for my community and my children to lead by example and show them that no matter how difficult your current circumstances are, there is always a way to achieve what you think may be the unthinkable.

Interestingly, the participants who said they dreamt of a doctorate from an early age had similar commonalities. One similarity was that they grew up in a low-income household and their parents held traditional jobs such as a receptionist, cafeteria worker, or cleaning personnel. Since there was not a parent in their household with a college degree, they did not have a role model upon which to emulate their educational aspirations. From a young age, these participants pushed through hardships and were determined to not let their circumstances get in the way of their goals. In an issue of *Health Services Research* (2003), “Low-income adolescents have reduced achievement motivation and are at a much higher risk of educational failure” (p.1231).

Despite the statistics, these gritty individuals overcame their childhood challenges and finished their doctorate. On average, those who grew up in a low-income home had a grit score of 4.3. This score was higher than those who grew up in a middle-income home (4.1), and those who grew up in an upper-class home (4.2). Participants whose mothers did not have a college education on average scored 4.25, compared to those of mothers with a college degree (4.18), and those whose mothers have an advanced degree (4.0). Concurrently, participants with fathers who dropped out of high school or were only high school graduates had an average grit score of 4.2, compared to those participants whose fathers had a college degree (4.13), or had an advanced degree (4.1).

Personal and Professional Sacrifices. In addition to learning about what led the graduates to pursue their doctorate, the participants candidly spoke about the sacrifices they had to make while in their doctoral program but still managed to finish: financial burdens,

relationships suffered, time was lost, and their mental health was at risk. Some participants took out student loans to pay for the heavy doctoral degree price tag, and one even took out a home equity loan. Those that experienced difficulties with their relationships mentioned that being in the doctoral program caused a strain on their marriage and friendships. EdD11V's marriage "suffered tremendously." She also was pregnant and had a child during her time in the doctoral program and "it was tough." Her sleep suffered and she "couldn't go to social events or away on vacations" because she was juggling her doctoral studies and raising a family. "My organization, the projects I wanted to do, the things in my house, I had to put everything aside for almost 4 years. It has to become part of you, every night." EdD11V (4.3 grit score) had to make many sacrifices in her personal life and had to overcome obstacles with her doctoral studies for years. She persevered through it all and did not let hindrances prevent her from success.

In this study, some participants put off family planning until they completed their doctorate, and others who already had a family had to explain to their families that "it will get better in a few years." Many participants added that they missed family events such as their children's games and dance recitals, as well as family time and eating dinner together. PhD1R experienced major complications with his marriage during his time in the doctoral program. "The doctoral program was the catalyst for my divorce." He forced himself to become so dedicated to completing his doctorate that it jeopardized many other facets of his life as well, including his job and finances. Through numerous ups and downs PhD1R still persisted:

The [doctoral] program took a lot of time from my family, with the night classes, and writing the dissertation, and it really got "helter-skelter" doing the dissertation because the coursework is relatively manageable. It's getting the dissertation that caused me to subtract a lot of hours from my family, and it caused me to be a little unfocused on my

job, because it was pressure to get it done, and it was also frustrating with the rewrites.

The challenge of that was just to plow through it and get to the point where certain things didn't matter.

Many participants experienced significant challenges during their doctoral program but displayed high levels of grit to persevere to the finish line. Divorce, marriage, job change, health issues (themselves and/or a close family member), death of a loved one, and taking care of children, grandchildren, and/or an elderly family member were substantial reasons to become sidetracked. Remarkably, those who experienced a significant challenge during their doctoral program had an average grit score of 4.35. These challenges delayed degree completion for most of the graduates, but they continued to persevere no matter their circumstance, over a period of many years. EdD12R (4.2 grit score) had to overcome the passing of his father during his time in the doctoral program. EdD12R was an only child and was very close to his father. "I was a year into the program, and it [the loss of my father] knocked me off balance for a few months, and my work progress slowed down a little bit while I attended to those personal matters." EdD12R had to reexamine his plan and "take care of my mother, my wife, and my children. I had to take care of his [my father's] estate, and everything else that comes with losing a father. That was a personal challenge." Duckworth et al. (2007) stated that grit occurs, "even when progress toward a goal is halting or slow" (p.1090).

Some participants shared they had to completely take time off from working on their doctorate due to personal or professional matters. EdD1A took a year off from his doctoral program because he "changed positions and wanted to make sure for the first year of my new position that I was solely focused on work and wasn't trying to finish up my dissertation at the same time." Another participant, EdD14K (4.5 grit score), said she could not work on her

dissertation for 3 months because she had too many personal obligations happening at the same time. EdD14K described how she overcame personal and professional obstacles that involved family members and co-workers but stayed the course:

Two of my sisters got pregnant and they were due within six weeks of each other, and one was virtually homeless, so she had to move in [with me] at nine months pregnant. And this was three weeks before my surgery. Then my mom came for the surgery and ended up staying [with me] for six months to help with my sister and my niece. So, there were just times where I could not focus [on my dissertation], there was just way too much going on to get any writing done. There were some work things, too. I was at a new school, and the principal I was working for was so intense and so micro-managing, and well-intentioned, but so controlling that I started feeling depressed because I didn't have any autonomy. I was battling that. I don't even know how I finished, honestly.

Grit is classified as a character trait (Duckworth, 2017) and benefits not only the gritty individual but also those around them. PhD4N (4.9 grit score) took care of his father and his widowed aunt while he was in his doctoral program. “I took both into my home simultaneously.” PhD4N had a full-time job, was married, and had four young children at the time. “It created a lot of stress in our marriage and family. I'm surprised my wife stayed with me because it was a terrible ordeal.” PhD4N took a few years off from working on his doctorate because he needed to spend time at home:

My wife even got cancer during this time. I had to take off a complete year to be with her and take her to the doctors. My mind was not on anything else. We ran into every obstacle you can think of and I said to myself, I will get it done, I will get it done, I will get it done. And so I got it done.

PhD4N also had health issues himself. “I had a stent put in my artery, and one of my stents collapsed, and I had to get another stent.” PhD4N endured numerous trials and tribulations but still managed to accomplish his doctoral degree by sticking to his commitments, even when life became enormously difficult. PhD4N exemplifies an extremely gritty individual because he was committed to his goal of doctoral completion over time while enduring forceful setbacks.

Many participants also experienced mental health issues, such as stress, depression, and anxiety, due to taxing situations they experienced during their doctoral program. Studying for the qualifier exam, preparing for the comprehensive exam, writing and rewrites of their dissertation, and most notably, the anticipation of waiting for a response from their dissertation adviser to show up in their email were noted causes of stress. However, none of the participants in this study completely dropped out of school (although the idea crossed some of their minds). To overcome their obstacles, some participants took a mental health break from their program with all intentions to get back to school and finish their degree. “Grit loses when we are unable to get back up after a setback. But when we get back up, it prevails,” (Duckworth, 2017). PhD6J (grit score 4.1) shared how he took a break from his doctoral program but had a solid plan for when he was ready to start up again. “I needed to get my head level and then reengage in the process so that I could give it one last push through to finish.” PhD6J discussed with his wife his plan to take a break and then get back to doctoral work:

I formulated a game plan on what our schedule and my schedule would be as far as devoting time to writing and research and finally set a hard deadline on when I wanted to get done. I also changed my advisor, which helped tremendously, because my first advisor had no intention of even helping me, it seemed.

Another participant, EdD10C (4.4), thought about completely dropping out many times but never did. He kept thinking “this is crazy, this is crazy, this is crazy.” He never thought he would be able to complete the dissertation. “The dissertation is a true test of perseverance, endurance, resilience, patience, and dedication, because it tests you in every possible way- socially, psychologically, and emotionally.”

Although some participants experienced obstacles that they overcame during the years they were in their doctoral program, it showed they had higher levels of grit compared to the participants that took less time to finish. The participants that took 2–3 years to complete their doctorate had an average grit score of 4.18. Participants that took 4–6 years to complete their doctorate had an average grit score of 4.04. Participants that took 7 years or longer to finish had an average grit score of 4.25.

In conclusion, grit played a role in doctoral completion for both EdD and PhD students. No matter the circumstances, the participants in this study persevered through many obstacles and successfully completed their doctoral program. Current research describes reasons why doctoral students drop out of their programs, such as financial setbacks, frustrations with their adviser or committee, or stress from the strenuous doctoral process. In this study, it was revealed that most of the participants experienced some form of hindrance during their doctoral program. It is important to note that even though participants in this study experienced various levels of trials and tribulations, they all managed to complete their dissertation because they took ownership for their choices and accountability for themselves. “Grit is about having a goal you care about so much that it organizes and gives meaning to almost everything you do,” (Duckworth, 2017). Without grit, the participants in this study would not have persevered to the levels they did when challenges presented themselves. Every participant experienced situations

that tested their patience and will to continue and stayed the course to graduation. The participants in this study all exemplified a growth mindset, which, in turn, proved that grit played a role in doctoral completion.

Ready, Set, Goal! Goal Setting with the End in Mind

Once it was clear as to the reason why the graduates pursued their doctorate, it was necessary to learn how they used grit to stay on track through completion. It was important to discover the successful techniques doctoral graduates utilized in completing such an intense program over a long time-period. Over the course of data collection and interviews, the following techniques remained consistent as keys to success: goal-setting, prioritizing, and maintaining a balance between work, school, and personal life. The graduates were then asked to give advice and recommendations to future doctoral candidates to help them persevere to completion.

Strategies. Every participant in this study stated that they set goals to complete their doctoral program, and even more so when working on the writing phase of their dissertation. Strategies that the participants used included: think long-term (end in mind), take it step-by-step (strategy), set realistic goals and deadlines for yourself (prioritize), learn to manage your time (balance), choose a topic that is interesting to you (passion), and stay organized (feasibility). A dissertation includes numerous steps to complete: research, experimentation, data collection, analyzing, and writing. To break up the enormity of the task into digestible pieces, the participants described their goals to complete their doctorate, and explained their strategy to execute their plan. Covey (2004) said, “Goals are pure fantasy unless you have a specific plan to achieve them” (p.102). EdD13L’s strategy was to think long-term because he knew “there was a light at the end of the tunnel.” As opposed to seeing the doctoral program as “one

insurmountable hill” EdD13L’s goal-setting strategy to complete his doctoral program was to “think of it in pieces, one course at a time, one chapter at a time, one step in the process.” It was essential for EdD13L to approach the dissertation phase of his doctoral program in a similar format to his doctoral coursework. “When you're in a class, it's one paper at a time, one exam at a time, so I think a strategy that helped me was to break the dissertation up in increments mentally and know that it's doable.”

Participants in this study said that once they figured out their workable strategy to finish, their mindset changed. They no longer felt that doctoral degree attainment was impossible (after they created succinct goals with the end in mind). For example, EdD14K’s strategy was to reward herself for the small wins that led up to her big win. “My goal was to look up five articles on Sunday and read an article a day during the week. This to me was manageable.” To reward herself, she would take Saturdays off from doing any doctoral work whatsoever. “I had to create a system, reward myself by taking a day off, and those were the things that got me motivated. Before I knew it, I had almost finished chapter two and didn't even realize it.”

Another goal-setting strategy that participants used to finish their doctoral program was to create timelines and due dates for themselves. More specifically, during the dissertation phase, the participants committed to themselves to submit portions of their dissertation to their adviser in a timely manner. To keep themselves on track, some participants created schedules, timelines, and calendars to post in their office. PhD13O posted his timeline in his office, so he could see it daily. “I used a white board in my office to write down deadlines and goals to accomplish by certain dates. It was not easy to stay on task, but this strategy was the only way I was able to finish.” A very specific strategy that PhD15A used to help her complete her doctoral

program was to implement SMART goals: specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, and timely:

I gave myself a daily goal of writing at least 250 words a day and then I ended up increasing that to 500 words per day. What I can do is I can measure that, and I discovered that when I would sit down to write I would write more. And that helped me to complete my dissertation.

Keeping “the end in mind” was also a popular sentiment mentioned by some participants who began their journey towards a doctorate and wanted to follow through on their commitment. EdD10C thought about his doctorate as “short term sacrifice, long term gain. Where do I want to be when I’m 50?” Covey (2004) stated that someone who thinks with the end in mind, “has a plan and sets goals” (p.102). PhD5E said that she, “always had the image of the day I defended my dissertation and walking out of that room feeling the huge weight lifted from my shoulders.” This tactic to envision themselves at their defense helped participants in this study to keep a clear picture of their ultimate goal and to continue to take the right steps towards that goal.

Keep it a Priority. Doctoral completion was a major priority for all participants in this study. Specifically, nine graduates said it was their number one priority over everything else. PhD14D said, “It was more important than having a child, more important than even keeping my job. It was my number one priority.” Some participants, such as EdD11V, said they needed to make it a priority to finish because they were always thinking about it. “It was always on the back of my mind. In that last 6 months, I just wanted it done above everything else. I knew I was never going to rest until it was finished.” For some, completing their doctorate was a priority for career advancement. It was important to stick to their goals because work was

paying part of their tuition, which was a motivating factor to finish in a timely fashion. PhD9T said,

My job was paying part of my tuition, which helped a lot. To get reimbursed I had to submit my final grades to the accounting department at the end of each semester. When it came down to taking classes that allowed more freedom, like Dissertation 1, Dissertation Advisement, and Dissertation Continuation, I knew there was no time to slack off. My goal was to finish the degree as soon as possible, so it was a huge priority for me.

Pressure from family, friends, and colleagues also created a sense of urgency for the participants to complete their doctorate. EdD9S recalled people asking him when he would be finished with his dissertation and wonder why it was taking so long. “There are people who wanted me to complete it, and there were people who maybe didn't want me to get it done.” EdD9S wanted to finish what he started and said, “I didn't want my failure to achieve to be a sore spot, and so that was a little intrinsic motivation on my part.”

There was a clear consensus among all the participants that it was a priority for them to complete their doctorate. Dropping out or remaining ABD was not an option. EdD13L added, “You're never going to finish if it's not a priority, because there's always other things that you're going to put first.” Even though other priorities may be important, “if you always leave the dissertation at the bottom of your list, you'll never get it done.” At some point the doctoral work needs to be placed high up on the list of important tasks and “it doesn't have to be a priority 24/7, but it must be a priority that you set time aside for. In any given week or month, you need to dedicate time and make it a priority.” It was important for the doctoral graduates to work on their lead measures. As Sean Covey (2012) stated, “Twenty percent of activities produce eighty

percent of results. The highest predictors of goal achievement are the 80/20 activities that are identified and codified into individual actions and tracked fanatically” (p.35).

Balance. Although doctoral completion was a top priority to the participants in this study, they still needed to manage their personal life and career. A popular technique used by participants was to notably create a schedule, but to communicate it with their family and friends. Often, the participants could not participate in many family functions or social events. Family oriented or extroverted participants experienced a personal struggle when they had to choose to stay home and work on their dissertation instead of socializing with friends and family. The participants in this study made a strong commitment to work on their dissertation even when distracted by other preferable options. For single participants like PhD2M, doctoral work came first but he still wanted to socialize with his friends. During the week he would “come home from work, eat dinner, and then do my doctoral work until 2 or 3 in the morning.” PhD2M’s firm schedule was a goal-setting technique that he strictly adhered to, so he could keep a balanced lifestyle and socialize on the weekends. To keep PhD13O’s life in balance he categorized social events based on their level of importance. “Some things I categorized as major priorities, like an important family event or an important work trip. If it wasn’t in my major priority category, then I took that time to work on my writing and research.”

EdD15Y was married with young children during his time in the doctoral program. It was very important to him to keep a healthy balance between his doctoral studies and family. “I didn’t begin my work at home until my kids were asleep.” EdD15Y also used the weekends to the best of his advantage to “spend at least one day on the weekend taking care of family obligations and then one day was dedicated to my dissertation work.” EdD15Y’s goal to

complete his doctorate was to set a schedule and choose times that had the least impact on family and work during the week to keep his life in balance.

Weekends were best to work on their dissertation for some, while others preferred to work early in the morning. Some participants worked straight through their lunch breaks, while others made the commitment to read or write a certain amount each day to help them stay aligned with their goals. EdD17H set a goal to take every lunch hour at work to study and research, and then write for at least 30 minutes in the evenings. “Thirty minutes was the bare minimum, but there were some nights that went over five hours, and some that were all-nighters.” EdD17H balanced her life to weave her doctoral work into her daily schedule, so she would have family time on the weekends. EdD13L had a family and did not want to “shut them out.” His solution was to study at the library in the evenings, and on the weekends he would work from home, which allowed him to be present at home with family. This tactic allowed him to manage his time with his family while still getting work done. EdD13L communicated with his family the importance of working on his doctoral studies and, in turn, were understanding and respectful of his time away from them:

Since I had kids and things going on at home, it was more conducive to go to campus where it was quiet, like on a Saturday or a Sunday, and I would stay late after everybody had left, and I would just work. Once I got home, there would be all these competing things. The kids would want to do things, or my wife would want to do things, so I would kind of just separate myself. And then other times, if I felt like I needed to be part of family life, I set up my own sort of little area in my bedroom where I could just close the door, work for a couple of hours, but then come out and do something with family, take a break, and then go back. It was sort of a physical separation of going to a different

room and shutting the door. My wife and my family were very understanding of that, so they knew if I was doing some work, they would try to leave me be. This way I was able to stay focused on my goals and keep a balance.

Advice. Completion of the dissertation and obtaining the degree allowed some introspection from the graduates. In retrospect the participants were asked, “What advice would you give to a doctoral student struggling to finish their dissertation?” PhD8H recommended to stay the course and “think clinical about this, not emotional.” She shared to “not take anything personal” because you will “receive feedback that you may not like, but you need to make the changes that are suggested to you and go with it.” She concluded, “Keep your eye on the prize and know you will finish. Live the self-fulfilling prophecy that you will graduate.”

EdD5G recommended managing the scope of the research. “There's a formulaic approach to writing a dissertation. Make sure you address all the parts and keep going until you've got all the slices.” The goal of dissertation completion should not be so difficult that the student will fail or experience exorbitant amounts of frustration. It is important to set goals relative to the individual's capability. According to Covey (2012), “Exceptional execution starts with narrowing the focus, clearly identifying what must be done, or nothing else you achieve really matters much” (p. 23). EdD5G added, “You're not trying to set the world on fire with your dissertation, you're just trying to get it done, and contribute to the field that you're representing. It doesn't have to be a world-altering piece of literature.”

A goal-setting technique that EdD16E recommended for a struggling doctoral student would be to make the work “part of your routine” and “schedule it like you would schedule anything else.” No matter how lost or frustrated the student feels, EdD16E, suggested to, “force yourself to sit down and just do it. Then at the end of every session, always write down what

you need to do next to achieve that goal.” Another participant, EdD18N shared a few pieces of advice:

There's no reason that you can't complete something that a whole bunch of other people have done. It's a marathon, not a sprint, and you have been prepared, you have been prepared to think critically, to analyze tests, and actually create something positive for the educational world. The dissertation is tough. It's something that you can do, you just must find what it is that you are passionate about. Pick a topic that you're passionate about. Get the first three chapters approved. A goal setting technique for me was to think narrow versus globally. Being able to articulate exactly what it is you are trying to study, and how that will be a benefit for the educational community. That's the hardest part. You must almost change your way of thinking.

PhD5E's advice about goal-setting was inspired by learning about the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. “Anyone, anywhere, in any situation can relate to the 7 habits.” PhD5E recommended that doctoral candidates should “live in the Q2 mindset.” To keep PhD5E's goals in line during her doctoral program she learned to “procrastinate less” and would recommend to “say no to things that take away your time from what you need to focus on.”

Every participant in this study set a goal to complete their doctorate, executed their plan, and received the results when they successfully defended their dissertation. Creating what Locke and Latham (1990) referred to as accuracy goals, the doctoral graduates were able to “carefully plan and identify the best paths to achieve their goals with minimal deviation” to achieve their doctorate. “Having a clear, compelling goal mobilizes your focus toward actionable behavior” (Boss, 2017, para.3) and achieving goals builds self-efficacy. It is apparent that goal-setting was intrinsic to doctoral completion for the participants in this study.

It Takes a Village- The Effect Social Support Has on Doctoral Student Completion

During my interviews with the doctoral graduates, a reoccurring theme developed that supported the necessity of social support to aid in doctoral completion. According to Dr. Fairbrother (2011), “Social support is the physical and emotional comfort given to us by our family, friends, co-workers and others. It's knowing that we are part of a community of people who love and care for us, and value and think well of us” (p.7). It became clear that social support was incredibly valuable in different forms for both sets of graduates. The following section explains how support from family and friends was valued by the participants. Also of note was the distinction in levels of social support between the two programs due to the nature of the cohort vs. non-cohort structure. The following section will reveal my findings through participant interviews.

Family and Friends. Lin, Simeone, Ensel, and Kuo (1979) described social support as, “support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community” (p.109). In this study, every participant received a form of social support from family, friends, classmates, or a significant other. Many participants who were in a relationship during their doctoral program stated that their significant other provided the most support unilaterally. Both the doctoral candidate and their significant other felt as though they were “in it together,” sharing in both struggles and victories as a team. Some candidates had a very strong support system, such as EdD14K, “Everyone was very supportive, even in times I wasn't wanting to go on. My family was supportive of whatever I chose.” EdD14K explained that her mom would “just listen and be a good ear for me venting, and not be judgmental.” When faced with the decision of whether to continue her doctorate, EdD14K received tough love

from her fiancé. “He said, ‘if you quit, fine, but don't come running to me after, I don't want to hear it. You live with the choice you make.’” According to Charney (2004),

Theoretical models of social support specify the following two important dimensions: (1) a structural dimension, which includes network size and frequency of social interactions, and (2) a functional dimension with emotional (such as receiving love and empathy) and instrumental (practical help such as assistance with child care) components (p.208).

PhD6J had a supportive spouse who felt like they were together on the journey. “My wife would bring me lunch if I were studying, or keep me motivated to finish it, and would be someone I could vent my frustrations to, which helped probably the most of all. We went through this together.” EdD7T experienced “layers of support” from his family and friends and explained, “I spent the first 50 years of my life hearing my parents tell my siblings and I the virtues of higher education attainment, so they were very supportive.” While EdD7T was in his doctoral program he shared that his parents would offer to take his kids out to dinner or to go to a function with them. “They would just call up and offer their support on the phone.” EdD7T said that even his secretary was supportive of him obtaining his doctorate. “I didn't have anybody who didn't want me to be successful. Anybody who's successful, even at a uniquely singular task as writing your dissertation, is enveloped in layers of support from other people that you don't know or realize.” Crediting his success in part to the support he received, EdD7T was able to complete his doctorate in 3 years.

One participant experienced lower levels of family social support, and it took him 8 years to graduate. PhD1R explained that he and his wife were on the verge of a divorce before he began the program, and so the doctoral program became the catalyst to end his marriage. “My wife showed support in the beginning, and then it lost all importance to her. As much as you tell

other people that you're going for your dissertation, it's exciting news at the beginning, but after a while, it's your problem.” In addition, PhD15A expressed how her social support was bitter sweet and that her significant other was somewhat supportive:

I think, in a good way, he was the person that would say, ‘If you don't get this done soon, maybe you need to walk away from it.’ At times that was hard for me to hear, but he is a very realistic type of person. He would say, ‘This is hurting you and you need to think about what this is all about.’ He would be like, ‘When are you going to get this done so you can spend time with me and so I don't have to hear about this anymore?’ He came into my life mid process [dissertation] so that's the only thing he had known about me.

EdD vs PhD Program Experience. According to Cohen and Lakey (2000), the most widely considered theoretical perspective on social support is that, “social support reduces the effects of stressful life events on health (i.e., acts as a stress buffer) through either the supportive actions of others (e.g., advice, reassurance) or the belief that support is available” (p.29). In this study, only some participants received social support from their doctoral program (classmates, advisers, or faculty). The EdD students that were part of a cohort experienced a far higher level of social support from their doctoral program than the PhD students. Of the 18 EdD graduates interviewed, 16 EdD graduates said they received some form of social support from their doctoral program. Dissimilarly, 12 PhD students said they did not receive any form of social support from their doctoral program whatsoever, while 3 PhD students said they did receive support.

In the EdD program, cohort collaboration was an integral part of the social support students received during their doctoral program to finish in a timely manner. According to Callaghan (2014), “Cohorts positively influence student values, increase student interaction and

secure greater interdependence through team building, mutual support and collaboration” (para.3). EdD15Y described, “If I had to identify one thing that was the one key to get me through, it was relying on my cohort members. We motivated each other to get it done, to stay focused, and to concentrate.” EdD15Y added that his “dissertation advisor, second reader, and some colleagues at work also helped me get through the program.” Another EdD graduate, EdD11V, expressed that her cohort helped to hold her accountable. “Our cohort was very tight, as far as studying and getting through the classes. We worked together, and it really was a team approach.” In addition, when EdD11V’s cohort members would get past certain milestones in the program she said, “We would email them congratulations, and that would help everyone's motivation.” EdD13L described how his cohort communicated with each other through words of encouragement and by getting together outside of class socially, as a form of support through camaraderie:

Our cohort was on a chain mail, and so as people were going through the process they would shoot out an email saying, “Hey, I just got through IRB, you guys can do it!” It's always nice to be there in classes and stuff, having people that maybe after class you can go into town and have a beer with, chat with. People were definitely encouraging.

The cohort system provided the EdD graduates with the opportunity to experience consistent communication within the same group of students. Through this arrangement, the EdD graduates experienced social support from one another without formally realizing it. Lakey and Orehek (2011) refer to this phenomenon as relational regulation theory (RRT) and hypothesized that “main effects occur when people regulate their affect, thought, and action through ordinary yet affectively consequential conversations and shared activities, rather than through conversations about how to cope with stress” (p.482).

Conversely, many PhD graduates expressed they did not feel that they received much social support at all from their peers and would have liked more support from their doctoral program itself. PhD13O would have welcomed the support from anyone in his program. Although his committee would give him feedback on his writing when necessary, “No one called or emailed and checked in on me- that would’ve been nice.” PhD13O added, “If I didn’t submit a chapter there was no one hunting me down for it. I can definitely see how people become ABD because there is no one in the program holding you accountable.” PhD1R, another PhD graduate, expressed that altogether he received social support from his colleagues at work, and he did not receive social support from anyone in his doctoral program. He justified this by acknowledging the process was an individual one, and he had only himself to rely on. “I learned from the experience that it was all about me. If you don't want it for yourself, you don't do this much work for somebody else.” PhD1R’s sentiment supports Cohen and Lakey’s (2000) research that explained, “Supportive actions are thought to enhance coping performance, while perceptions of available support lead to appraising potentially threatening situations as less stressful” (p.30).

Although most PhD and EdD participants did not attend a formal dissertation workshop or seminar, many EdD graduates created informal dissertation study groups with one another. Some advisers of the EdD students even formed private advising sessions in which they invited the EdD students they were working with to read over their papers and give immediate feedback. EdD4J described her session with her adviser:

There were maybe about 7 or 8 of us out of the group of twenty that were working on our methodology section. We went one-by-one and my advisor critiqued it, and the other students in the cohort offered their suggestions and their thoughts on it. I think there

were 8 of us, and I want to say out of that, 6 of us have all completed our dissertations at this point in just over 2 years.

Another EdD graduate, EdD8D, said that his adviser made time to advise his students, hoping to keep them on track to graduate in a timely manner. “We did have times during the program where we would meet with him, and he made sure that we were hitting key milestones to stay on track to graduate in the 2 years.”

PhD10K felt that the dissertation content is so individualized that she thought it would not be feasible to create a workshop or writing group that could benefit everyone who attended. She thought that everyone was at a different point in their dissertation, and it would not have helped her. “I’m someone who does better by myself than in a group setting, I don’t like groups that share writing with each other. I thought the classes had prepared me for what I need to do.” EdD2B pointed out that for the students that did take a break or took longer than expected, they may have needed to brush up on some content in a workshop format. “I think that would be helpful for people who are stuck, to get back into a group and map out the plan.”

Social support was influential for both EdD and PhD graduates in the completion of their doctoral degree, and most participants felt they could not have completed their dissertation without that support. Because the EdD and PhD programs were formatted differently from one another, social support from their respective doctoral programs varied greatly. EdD and PhD graduates received functional dimensions of both emotional and instrumental components. EdD graduates experienced support through structural dimensions because they were in a cohort. PhD graduates did not experience support through structural dimensions because frequent social interactions with the same classmates throughout their entire program was non-existent. Since EdD graduates received a large portion of their support from their cohort, much of that burden

was alleviated from family and friends. Most PhD students did not receive social support from anyone in their doctoral program, but many of them stated that they would have appreciated more guidance and interaction from their advisers. A higher level of family and friend support was identified in PhD graduates in part due to the lack of peer and advisory support within the PhD program. In this study, the non-traditional cohort format in the EdD program was very much a collaborative experience, and the traditional format in the PhD program was a solo journey. Nonetheless, the findings in this research prove that social support is influential in doctoral program completion.

You're on Your Own Kid! Transition to Dissertation

The final theme discusses the concluding stages of the graduates' experiences in their doctoral program, specifically the research and dissertation phase. It is important to discuss the difference between course work and dissertation work since it is the stage of the doctorate where many individuals become deterred and averted. The following section will discuss the reasons why the dissertation phase sidetracked many of the participants in this study from their time schedule to graduate, and more specifically, it will describe the experience from both EdD and PhD graduates' perspectives. This section includes narrative from interviews with the graduates as to how they got through the dissertation phase successfully.

Responses regarding the participants' experiences when they transitioned from coursework to dissertation varied greatly. Since the EdD graduates were in a 2-year program with a cohort, most began work on their dissertation at the same time they began their coursework. The EdD faculty were available to help those ready to start dissertation work. The EdD students who had their topics prior to their coursework being finished reported a more positive experience during the dissertation writing and research phase than those EdD graduates

who chose to start their dissertation writing and research until after the coursework was complete. These findings support past researchers who found that selecting their dissertation topic early on was significant for successful degree completion (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Delaney, 1981; Grissom, 1985; Mah, 1986; McCabe-Martinez, 1996). Thirteen out of 18 EdD graduates in this study expressed they had a positive experience transitioning from coursework to their dissertation. Fourteen out of 15 PhD graduates expressed they had a mediocre experience transitioning from coursework to their dissertation. However, interestingly, all PhD graduates shared a similar sentiment: they knew the dissertation stage was going to be difficult. The PhD graduates said they began their dissertation work only after they completed their coursework and passed their qualifier and comprehensive exams but were mentally prepared for the rough journey ahead. Past research (Mah, 1986) has shown that the change of doctoral program structure from organized classes to dissertation work hinders degree completion, and in Huguley's (1988) study, the lack of structure in the dissertation stage was reported to be an obstacle to completion by 50% of ABDs.

Edd Transition. EdD1A worked on his dissertation and coursework simultaneously. "I enjoyed the freedom and I was ready to go, and what I thought was helpful was starting to work with my advisor and starting to develop goals and develop those projects early in the process." EdD1A thought it was important to begin work on his dissertation on "day one." EdD9S worked closely with his advisor through the transition process and had no problems making the adjustment from the coursework to the dissertation. "When you are working on your own, once you get those few prime directives from your adviser, you can go ahead and start, and delve into it as quick and as deep as you want to." EdD9S stated that his adviser provided him with a clear structure and timeline when researching and writing the dissertation. He explained:

We'd go chapter by chapter and we'd hit them that way. It seems like the first three chapters were the ones my advisor wanted a timeline on more than the others because my advisor wanted to make sure I was going in the right direction. Then my advisor made corrections and re-routed me so when I got to the fourth chapter it was a whole lot easier to put together and there weren't any surprises.

Astoundingly, EdD16E, recalled that some students in her cohort had already defended while still taking courses:

On our last day of class, some of our cohort members had already defended. There were half the people from our cohort that had made progress and were about to graduate, and half the people were left to their own devices, and that was it. There was no follow-up. There was no transition, there was none. It was a shock as to how different it was to every other aspect of the doctorate.

For the EdD graduates who chose to start their dissertation after their coursework was completed, many were unclear as to what their next step should be. While the structure during the coursework stage included assignment deadlines, readings, and presentations, the dissertation process presented neither deadlines nor much guidance. EdD7T expressed one of his criticisms of the cohort was, "how much of the process one must deduce on one's own." EdD7T's frustrations progressed to the point at which he was "practically begging for a check list of things to do from the start of my dissertation." He explained further:

I did 26 drafts of the dissertation, and there were things you figure out about 18 drafts in that you wish you had known at the beginning that would have made your life so much easier. Ultimately, I think the research and articulation of the essential question, and justifying it, doing the diligence of finding out what happened in the literature, I thought

that all had great value, but I also think that for every hundred people who write a dissertation, maybe one of them goes on to actually conduct research, so it's a massive individual investment, and I'm not quite sure how to quantify the return. We've been doing doctorates like this for hundreds of years, and what's the net return on the field of knowledge on it? I would very much like the program to have deconstructed a dissertation built in its format and in the process that generates the format.

Many EdD graduates that only began their dissertation after their coursework was completed said they reached out to members of their cohort for social support to help get them through the dissertation stage. Some students who had gotten further along in the process would share their success with one another. When classmates had questions about the IRB process or defense preparation they were able to receive guidance and support from one another. Some needed social support to simply “bounce ideas from someone;” others needed social support to “vent their frustrations.” EdD7T said he reached out to his friends for social support and asked them to “serve as my accountability partners, and kind of referees to keep me focused.”

PhD Transition. Across the board, PhDs had an even more difficult experience in transitioning into their dissertation writing phase than most EdDs. PhD10K explained that she was ready to start her research but that the guidelines for writing the dissertation “were a little bit murky,” as she went from structured courses with defined deadlines and due dates to “this open-ended project.” She would have been more prepared if she was provided with a detailed dissertation guide that outlined the format of writing the dissertation to the preference of her adviser:

The faculty told you loosely how they wanted it structured, in terms of chapters, but I felt that I got the most learning out of reading other people's dissertations who had my advisor as their chair and using those formats for mine.

Additionally, PhD9T offered his sentiments on the lonely journey after classes were over as he transitioned to the writing stage of his dissertation. PhD9T felt that the transition period was difficult because:

The coursework is kind of finite, a set amount of things you would do, tasks that were given to you by the instructor to complete. You do that in a group setting with other people. Then you switch to the dissertation writing and the structure is gone, and the deadlines are no longer there, and the benchmarks are all self-imposed, and you are working mostly in isolation, so there's not a thought partner to work with so that was, to me, mentally difficult.

PhD12P expressed similar feelings towards the transition process of writing his dissertation.

“For me, it [the transition] was like getting thrown into the deep end of the pool. It was an as an eye-opening experience.” He went on to explain, “You go from stuff that was highly structured, ‘this is due on this date,’ to being like, ‘alright, go for it!’ And suddenly, you're thinking, ‘I don't have any due dates or classes to attend.’” PhD12P further remarked that the independent transition phase is a “completely different mindset” from taking courses because “when you're in class, people are talking to you all the time about what you're doing, and then you transition to working on your own and you have to totally readjust your approach.”

Likewise, making the transition for PhD13O was a major adjustment. He understood that the dissertation process is what sets the doctorate apart from other degrees. “There's no doubt that part of the crucible of getting your doctorate is that you've got to be able to work

independently on your research.” PhD13O added that it was a “very significant transition” for him:

I was ready to work independently but I was confused as to what my committee wanted. I felt like they all had different opinions and suggestions. One member was obsessed with my formatting and made numerous suggestions, and another committee member would go back and forth with my chair about the direction of my methodology. I wasn’t prepared for all the changes that I would need to make. At that point I did whatever they wanted me to do so I could just get it done.

Some participants, such as PhD14D, felt that “the real PhD doesn't get started until the coursework is done and you start doing research.” PhD14D found difficulty working with his adviser when he began his dissertation work and referred to his dissertation adviser and faculty as “lacking organization and accountability.” An aspect of the dissertation experience PhD14D did not like was the “ambiguity of the adviser I worked with and not being provided with any clear timelines.” PhD14D became very irritated with the process because he wanted to keep forging ahead but became frustrated with his adviser constantly “questioning, nitpicking, and in my opinion, delaying” the process. “I was very good at working independently, but I was not happy at the pace that the professor had me at [*sic*].”

For PhD students, the traditional PhD program was not seen as a viable opportunity for students to collaborate during the writing stage of their dissertation. Outside social support became a necessary survival tool for the PhD candidates once coursework was completed and the structure changed. PhD8H said, “The social support from my family was what kept my head up. I don’t know how people can go through the dissertation process without social support.” PhD1R found creative ways for support aside from his family and friends. “My support came

from a lot of ways outside of the program because the people from my program weren't really around.” PhD1R continued to say, “I used YouTube a lot because you can learn a lot from the experience of others who have done the same thing as you, and that helped a lot believe it or not.” In some ways, the solo experience of writing the dissertation became apparent that it was more of a group effort.

Surviving the Dissertation. Participants in this study experienced a wide variety of uphill battles in the initial phase of their dissertation that included: lack of guidance from their adviser, ambiguity of which format to follow, and the absence of a timeline or due dates. Boozer (1972) and Lovitts (1996) discovered that when students are disappointed in or are dissatisfied with their doctoral programs, they are far more likely to abandon the doctoral process (Bair & Haworth, 1999). In this study, the graduates that were disappointed in or were dissatisfied with their doctoral programs persisted through to completion. Duckworth (2016) stated, “Grit is not just having resilience in the face of failure, but also having deep commitments that you remain loyal to over many years” (p.50). The graduates utilized their sense of growth mindset to push through a very difficult period in their doctoral program.

Goal-setting was also important to many participants during the post coursework stage, and they used their skillset of creating tools such as schedules or timelines to keep them focused once on their own. EdD15Y explained that the transition for him was a challenge because it was “unstructured” and that the transition period after coursework completion was where “many people fall down.” EdD15Y described his technique to survive the dissertation phase:

I'm very goal oriented, I set goals that I want to accomplish, and I stay laser-focused. But at the time, I could definitely sense in myself that it was about to get a little more difficult

to be disciplined enough to do the work outside of a structured class. I was able to overcome that just because of how goal-oriented I am.

When questioned, participants would have preferred very clear guidelines placed in the beginning of the dissertation process. The participants felt frustrated because they were unaware of their adviser's preferential style to format a dissertation. PhD3F explained that he did not need structure the whole time, but would have liked it just to get started:

I would've preferred something more structured. It took a lot of discipline at first. When I first started after Dissertation 1 and 2, I wasn't doing anything. I had to get myself in gear - it was very difficult. I don't know for how long I would've wanted something structured, but I would've wanted something to get me moving in those initial stages.

Having guidelines and set time frames would have been helpful. Just starting, you need a little push to get yourself working. It's suddenly, "Hey, I don't have to go to class" and you must get yourself back in gear.

Graduates that received social support from their adviser or a faculty member during their dissertation stage reported to be less frustrated about their dissertation than those who did not receive support from their program faculty. Bair and Haworth (1999) discovered in their research of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methodology studies that, "where positive relationships between students and their advisors or other faculty members were present, students were significantly more likely to complete their doctoral degrees than students for whom such positive relationships did not exist" (p.17).

Participants provided recommendations for their specific doctoral program to improve the experience for future doctoral candidates. These recommendation topics ranged from better

program structure to increased communication between the doctoral candidate and their dissertation adviser. Table 4 provides the participants' suggestions in their own words.

Table 4

Doctoral Graduate Recommendations for Doctoral Program Improvement

Participant	Program	Recommendation
EdD1A	EdD	How the faculty integrates the dissertation into the different classes is important. They should make sure that it's something that is being addressed from those first meetings so that is something that people see as almost a culmination of the entire program and not just this "set aside" that you have to do at the end. I think the people in my cohort that struggled with completion didn't have a firm sense of what they were working on during the classes so that at the end it became this project that was still hanging out there versus something that was just in the process of just finishing up.
EdD2B	EdD	I recommend regular contact with their mentor. And by contact, I mean, not just "hey, how are you doing?" but regular feedback on the dissertation and the plan development.
EdD15Y	EdD	Structure support groups or dissertation writing seminars, even if they're not formalized, so that people can vent, speak about the problems they're having, ask specific questions, how to overcome certain aspects of their dissertation, be it research, the writing of it, whatever it may be. Having some of those post-classwork dissertation seminar meetings ongoing would be helpful, whether they were required or not. That support would help them and would probably go a long way in helping those people that were struggling. That ongoing support and cohort support would be valuable.
EdD16E	EdD	I think the mentor should ask the student what timeframe they want to work with, and not make assumptions, and they should develop a schedule. Between the mentor and the student should develop a schedule and a plan. I think a plan or schedule should be made and checked up on in addition to the mentor. Have an accountability partner and for the student and mentor to be held accountable.
PhD6J	PhD	More hard timelines, expectation management, and just direction and communication in general.
PhD7G	PhD	Set guidelines and due dates. Many doctoral students have no problem doing the research on their own, but when there is no timeline set and no due dates, I can see how people become ABD. It definitely takes a lot of grit to get this done on your own. It also takes a strong backbone because you are told no and to redo it so many times that it can be crushing.
PhD5E	PhD	The program needs to encourage the advisors to communicate properly with their doctoral candidates. I understand the work needs to be done alone, but if the advisors made themselves more available to check the students work for them to continue without taking much time off, I think that would be helpful.
PhD2M	PhD	One of the biggest issues that people have is in terms of structure. Knowing what to put in an introduction, knowing what to say for chapter 3. I think having workshops on more basic things like that, how to structure the dissertation, what goes into individual chapters, what material you should save for a later point.
PhD1R	PhD	I think that while doctoral students are in the dissertation stage, they need to have a class where all of the PhD's are together. I don't mean just when they're taking the class, but I mean when they're doing the dissertation. You don't know where other people are at the same point in their PhD and it would help to not feel so alone.
PhD15A	PhD	I think that the minute students are taking directed research, starting from that class onward, there should be an ongoing discussion about dissertation and its components. It's almost like the dissertation seminar 1 should be before you do the comprehensive. Then you would have an idea and then you would do the comps and then you would do your lit review. I think that there are certain skills incorporated into the process. There are certain things in the process that can be pulled into the classes sooner so that when it came time to do the independent work they have the tools to do it successfully and quickly and painlessly.

The most common recommendations were for dissertation advisers to improve communication with their doctoral candidates and for the program to outline a more specific and less vague structure of the dissertation. The graduates expressed the need for initial guidance from the dissertation chair as to when portions of their writing should be submitted and to implement clear expectations. According to Bair and Haworth (1999), the student/adviser relationship has been identified by many researchers as an important, if not the most important, variable in doctoral student attrition and persistence (Dickinson, 1983; Ferrer de Valero, 1996; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Presley, 1996).

Castaway or Survivor. In this study, participants expressed various viewpoints of the transition phase from coursework to dissertation. Some participants became erratic with their dissertation work habits once left on their own. Others quickly felt they were forced to become their own task master. For many participants, personal and professional obligations interfered during their dissertation phase, which created a rocky dissertation experience. Since the graduates did not have classes to attend or were given deadlines to complete work, many were left to fend for themselves. Consequently, this freedom affected the completion date by which some of the graduates had intended to defend their dissertation. Furthermore, the transition created a new-found freedom and forced the dissertation to become less of a priority. PhD14D took some time off but he eventually made the decision to commit himself to the process and eventually finish. As he described, “I started out really strong for the first 3 years,” and then “took about a year off.” PhD14D changed jobs and had a child so “there was a one-year period where I didn't do much and I didn't get much progress done.” It took PhD14D 5 years to complete his doctorate once he got himself back on track. “The last year I was very dedicated and went full steam ahead.”

Personal and professional obligations affected EdD13L's work habits who described them as inconsistent:

My study habits didn't really stay the same. They were much more sporadic, whereas when I was in classes, we were on such a tight schedule, we knew we had to study for an exam at a certain time, we had to hand things in at a certain point. Whereas with the dissertation it became much more random, whenever I could get time. It could be a holiday, or a slow day at school, so I would stay a few extra hours on a Sunday.

Whenever I could find the time, I would work on it.

EdD6O shared that his work and study habits became a lot more focused once he began his dissertation, but he had to stay on top of his adviser:

I think that's the difference between me and the people who don't make it. Nobody's telling you to keep on going. My mentor didn't check in on me, I was the one pushing him. I couldn't imagine spending 70–100 thousand dollars and not getting an EdD at the end of the day.

The transition from coursework to the dissertation stage affected the time it took 14 out of 15 PhD graduates in this study to complete their doctorate. The EdD graduates that began their dissertation at the same time as their coursework were not affected by a transition period between coursework and dissertation. The EdD graduates that began their dissertation after their coursework did not complete their doctorate in the 2-year timeframe outlined by the cohort program. In this study, it took those EdD graduates an additional year to complete their doctorate once they began their dissertation research (except for one participant who chose to take 6 years off for personal reasons).

Summary

The findings of this study suggest that grit, goal-setting, and social support all play an important role in doctoral completion for both EdD and PhD students. To endure the intense educational process, a doctoral degree requires students to sustain their focus and persist in challenging situations. The average grit scores of all participants was 4.1, and those participants that experienced challenging events from either their childhood or adulthood showed on average higher grit scores (4.3). The strategy of using goal-setting techniques was intrinsic to doctoral completion for both EdD and PhD graduates. All participants set a goal, tracked it, and accomplished their mission to complete their doctorate, sharing examples of how they set goals and what they did to see them through to the end. Participants in this study utilized goal-setting techniques and relied on social support to help get them through the transition from structured coursework to open-ended research.

Social support was influential for both EdD and PhD graduates, and participants experienced social support on different levels. Most EdD graduates looked towards their cohort for most social support, and PhD graduates turned more to their work colleagues, family, or friends. Both EdD and PhD graduates received social support from their family and friends, and those that were in a relationship reached out to their significant other for the most social support. Participants who worked closely with their adviser or university faculty had a positive experience during the transition into their dissertation than participants who did not work closely with a faculty member. However, a discrepancy exists in relation to the literature. The literature strongly reports that social support from the doctoral candidate's adviser is "instrumental in their successful completion, especially in the writing of the dissertation" (Jairam & Kahl, 2012, p.319). In this study, many PhD graduates expressed they did not receive much social support

from their adviser and preferred it that way. Most PhD participants favored family or friend support over faculty (adviser) or peer support.

The transition from coursework to dissertation greatly impacted the PhD graduates but only impacted a few EdD graduates. Since the EdD participants were in a program with a 2-year plan, many EdD graduates stuck to the plan and graduated in the allotted time frame. The transition did not impact those individuals who were members of an EdD cohort as much since they worked on their coursework and their dissertation simultaneously. The EdD graduates who chose to focus on their dissertation after completing their coursework were on average delayed by a year once they were on their own. Since the PhD participants were in a traditional doctoral program they could only formally begin their dissertation work after they passed their comprehensive exam, after which point they were on their own to write their dissertation proposal, conduct research, and defend. Within this timeframe, the PhD graduates' intended timeline was delayed due to the overabundance of freedom in creating their own schedule and lack of deadlines set by their adviser. However, because they set clear, attainable goals as to how they would complete their dissertation, these participants were more successful in the completion of their doctorate in a timely fashion.

Chapter 4 presented the data and results of this study. Chapter 5 will review the research method, summarize the findings for each research question, discuss the implications of how grit, goal-setting, and social support are intrinsic to doctoral completion, and offer recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this dissertation research was to examine the level of grit, methods of goal-setting, and the social support networks of Executive EdD and ELMP PhD graduates who have completed their doctoral degrees from a specific university. Approximately half of all doctoral students withdraw from their programs (National Science Foundation, 2017), and research tells us common reasons why doctoral students withdraw, but there is a critical need for research about best practices of how doctoral students persevere through to completion. Universities and doctoral students will find it crucial to continue this line of research as it directly relates to their retention of doctoral students and individual success as a doctoral student.

First, the acknowledgement of the personality trait, grit, is necessary when involving circumstances that take years to accomplish. Gritty individuals possess a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) and demonstrate passion and perseverance toward a goal regardless of being challenged by significant obstacles and distractions (Duckworth, 2016). Second, when those with a growth mindset create accuracy goals (Locke & Latham, 1990), they are said to have a learning goal orientation, which is essential to doctoral completion. Accuracy goals have clarity, are challenging, and show commitment (Locke & Latham, 1990). Third, social support is necessary to aid in the doctoral candidate's journey to completion. More important, social support from faculty or staff is fundamental during the doctoral candidate's dissertation stage to aid in student retention. The findings of social support for doctoral candidate success are pertinent to Sippel, Pietrzak, Charney, Mayes, and Southwick's (2015) findings, "Resilience in the individual is highly dependent on social systems that provide positive support, and that these systems enhance resilience through a variety of psychosocial and neurobiological mechanisms" (p.2). Fourth, more specific communication is necessary between doctoral candidates and their

dissertation chair during the dissertation stage to increase student support and to decrease doctoral student dropout rates or prolonged ABD circumstances.

This study's findings aided me in answering the research questions outlined in Chapters I and III. In the following section, I discuss the research methodology used and summarize the findings for each research question. Following, I discuss the implications of how grit, goal-setting, and social support are intrinsic to doctoral completion. Limitations of the study are then described, and recommendations for future research are offered.

Research Method

This qualitative study examined doctoral graduates' experiences from two different programs at a specific university. Data were collected from 18 EdD graduates and 15 PhD graduates and analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (2008) method of grounded theory.

Grounded theory permitted data to be collected from the perspective of the participants; thus, the grounded theory method presented an analytic approach that offered key findings related to the phenomenon. The study closely examined the participants' experiences during their doctoral program and identified their level of grit, goal-setting techniques, and specific forms of social support. The study offered insight on strategies that can guide doctoral candidates to program completion. Due to the gap in the literature, there were no studies from the qualitative grounded theory perspective that simultaneously examined grit, goal-setting, and social support in a doctoral program.

Individuals who graduated between 2007 and 2017 from the Executive EdD program and the ELMP PhD program at the specific university were each identified and contacted respectively through their EdD program office (EdD participants) or their alumni office (PhD participants) and were emailed a participant request form. Interested participants contacted me by email and I provided them with a research participant consent form. Once the consent form

was signed, a scheduled phone interview took place. Interviews were transcribed in NVivo 11 software, then I analyzed and compared repetitive themes and categories. Mind maps were created from the nodes, and themes quickly emerged. This process continued until data saturation occurred.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: *What role does grit play, if any, in doctoral completion of students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?*

In this study grit was a personality trait that was evident in all participants. The participants showed they had a growth mindset, which lends itself to having levels of grit. The average grit score in this study for PhD graduates was 4.2, and the average grit score for EdD graduates was 4.1. All graduates shared that they encountered obstacles of various types while completing their doctorate, and since grit is inherent to perseverance and resilience, grit played a major role in doctoral completion. In participants who experienced a significant struggle, grit showed to be an especially influential character trait. Grit showed to be particularly influential in graduates that had difficulty in childhood or experienced a significant struggle as an adult. As the individuals pushed through their circumstances, they overcame failure and did not let it affect them negatively. This personality trait became embedded in them and helped them persist through their doctoral program towards completion. Those who experienced significant adversity or trauma in their childhood or adult life had higher grit scores (4.3) compared to individuals that did not experience significant adversity or trauma (4.0).

Intelligence is not a factor that determines grit, nor does intelligence determine if a doctoral candidate will persevere to complete their doctorate. Bair and Haworth (1999) reviewed past research and discovered that GRE scores and GPA do not determine if students would

remain or drop out of their doctoral program. The participants in this study all had above average levels of grit and persevered to completion even when they encountered difficult struggles.

Research Question 2: *Is goal-setting intrinsic to doctoral completion of students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?*

All participants in this study set accuracy goals to help them complete their doctorate. The goals the participants set were specific, attainable, and challenging. Participants stuck to their goals and executed them until they reached doctoral completion. Various goal-setting methods were created by participants to complete their goals, such as setting personal deadlines and scheduling a set number of pages to write or articles to read each week. It was important for the graduates to create specific, attainable goals for themselves to complete their doctorate. It allowed them to stay on track and keep focused.

Research Question 3: *Is social support influential in the completion of a doctoral degree for students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?*

Social support was influential in the completion of a doctoral degree for participants in this study. Friends, family, and in many situations, significant others, played a vital role in the mental health of the graduates. Graduates in the EdD cohort experienced support from one another, and for most, it significantly helped them stay mentally fit as the cohort created a sounding board for questions, frustrations, and overall sanity. The PhD graduates lacked a coherent bond amongst their classmates and sought most of their support from family and friends.

Faculty or dissertation committee support varied between the two programs. Many EdD graduates expressed they were mostly satisfied with the available social support from their program to help them complete their doctorate. Most PhD graduates, however, did not experience social support from their program and desired more support. In this study, program support was derived from the following sources: (a) faculty from cohort, (b) faculty from classes taken throughout their doctoral program, (c) dissertation committee, and (d) dissertation adviser.

Research Question 4: *Does the transition from a class setting to an independent work environment during the dissertation process affect the time it takes to graduate from a doctoral program for students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?*

The transition from a class setting to an independent work environment during the dissertation process affected all PhD graduates in this study. The participants had an idea of when they would complete their doctorate but got off track when they were no longer taking structured courses. Most graduates who were affected by the transition were delayed 1–2 years to doctoral completion. In the traditional 4–5-year PhD program, it took the graduates on average 7 years to complete their doctorate. EdD graduates that began their dissertation writing and research when they started their coursework finished within 2 years of becoming matriculated. Most EdD graduates that began their dissertation after their coursework completed in 3 years of becoming matriculated.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have special significance for doctoral completion. Since doctoral completion is the highest degree one can earn from an institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), it is noteworthy to identify the tools and practices to sustain in such a program.

When grit, goal-setting, and social support are all put into practice, it creates the perfect recipe for doctoral degree success. It is important to note that one must first embrace a growth mindset to have grit. Growth mindset is a personality trait that aids an individual to learn and grow from their past. With a growth mindset grit can be put into practice on many levels. When an individual is proactive, and they make decisions with the end in mind, they can create a plan to execute their goals. Goal-setting is the second tool to doctoral success. Once the individual acknowledges their goals, they can manage themselves more effectively and efficiently. In doing so, they have a clear direction of what they want to accomplish, how they will do it, and by when they plan on accomplishing their goal. Time management is imperative for doctoral students and they must decide when to say no to certain activities, when to delegate effectively, and choose their priorities wisely.

Furthermore, when an adviser is directing the doctoral candidate during the dissertation process, it is important for the candidate to think with a win-win mindset. This begins when the candidate has provided ideas to his or her adviser, either verbally or written, and the adviser responds with feedback. It is important for the student to seek first to understand the recommendations from the adviser, then, to be understood to ensure the message has been precisely communicated. The doctoral candidate can then take his or her own ideas combined with their adviser's input and create a better outcome because the collaboration was communicated and interpreted at a higher level. This would be a true win-win for both the student and adviser.

The final tool to doctoral success is to synergize with academic friends, family, and faculty through social support. Social support can help buffer stressful times for a doctoral candidate and aid in the prevention of mental health disorders caused by stress or trauma. And

finally, to avoid burnout, the doctoral candidate should take time to focus on their own well-being: physically (i.e., eat healthy, exercise, sleep), spiritually (i.e., meditate, pray, listen to music), mentally (i.e., journal, read for pleasure, hobbies), and socially/emotionally (i.e., grab lunch with a friend, call a loved one, spend time with family). When doctoral candidates create a balanced lifestyle, they allow themselves to maintain and endure a challenging process that could be otherwise a strain on their personal and professional life.

Limitations

The individuals emailed in this study were sent requests through two different sources. The EdD participants were sent an email to participate in this study through the EdD program office. The PhD participants were sent an email to participate in this study through the university's alumni office. I received many volunteers to participate in the study immediately from the EdD graduates, and I slowly received volunteers to participate from the PhD graduates. Many EdD graduates informed me that they were told to check their email to participate in the study from someone who had already responded to participate and had spoken to me. Since many of the EdD cohort members remained close after graduation, it seemed that I received an interest to participate from EdD graduates that had a positive social support experience. Many of the PhD graduates that responded worked or worked at the university and were more apt to check their school email or to have a working email, which the alumni office had on record. It took an extra month to obtain the necessary PhD participants for this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of the present study, the following are recommendations for future research worth considering:

1. Future research should study the individuals that dropped from their doctoral program or those that remain ABD. Little is known about this population, and it would be interesting to learn their grit score, whether they had set accuracy goals for themselves, and if they had social support.
2. It would be interesting to interview the spouses and family members of doctoral graduates to learn their perspectives of the doctoral completion process. What type of strain and how much of a burden is placed on the spouses and family members from their own viewpoints? In addition, many spouses feel that they “earned” the doctorate as well, and it would be fascinating to find out what they think of the process and how they felt as the one who emotionally supported their significant other for years during the process.
3. It would be interesting to test a PhD cohort at the specific university to see the graduation success rates in comparison to the traditional PhD program.
4. Future research could focus on students that enter the doctoral program. It can be interesting to discover the grit scores of entering doctoral students and compare them with the grit scores of the doctoral graduates to find how they compare. In addition, since teaching a growth mindset and grit facilitates long-term goals and how to achieve them (Hochanadel & Finamore 2015), research can be conducted to compare doctoral students who are taught the concepts of growth mindset and grit in the early stages of their doctoral program. These students’ grit scores can be compared against themselves to see if they increased by the end of their doctoral completion.
5. Finally, the creation of a doctoral portal could be placed on the university library’s website to include recorded webinars, modules, important documents (IRB forms,

guidelines, etc.), a frequently asked question section, and a group chat or a help desk that allows faculty and alumni to respond to doctoral candidates. This could help eliminate frustrations felt from the doctoral candidates and take the pressure off program faculty and staff to respond to questions in a timely manner. A research study or survey could be created to identify doctoral candidates' perceptions of the effectiveness of the doctoral portal.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to discover what practices successful doctoral graduates utilized to graduate. As a doctoral candidate that took time off from my research due to both personal and professional obligations, it was interesting to me to learn that there are no secrets or tricks to completing a dissertation or finishing a doctoral program, because it starts with a growth mindset. Growth mindset can be learned, and once that personality trait is developed, grit can be instilled in oneself. Some individuals have higher levels of grit, and it may be due to obstacles they encountered throughout their life. No matter the goal, grit can take you to the finish line.

During my interview process I encountered doctoral graduates with such amazing stories of hardships and obstacles, but also stories of pride and success. Even though every participant in this study encountered frustrations for various reasons at one point or another, in the end, they expressed how much it meant to them (and their families) to have accomplished such a great feat. All the stress and pressure they endured over this period was worth it in the end. My take-aways from the participants' stories of accomplishments are simple:

1. **Decide:** tell yourself you can do this (growth mindset) and that nothing is going to stop you (grit).

2. **Own It:** create a plan of how you will finish your doctorate (goal-setting) and talk about it (social support).

3. **Do It:** take your plan step-by-step and see it through to the end. Don't be afraid to ask for help when necessary.

The practicality of these three steps is basic and not intended to frame the process of the doctorate as easy by any means. They are the foundational steps to take accountability and ownership of the gigantic task that every student that enters a doctoral program chose to embark on. Past research blames financial burdens, personal and professional hardships, and a lack of faculty communication as common factors to doctoral student disengagement. Although these are valid reasons, the participants in this study encountered these adversities and pushed through them. No one ever said that completing a doctorate would be easy!

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Appendix A

Pre-Interview Survey
Study on Doctoral Student Completion

Contact and Demographic Information

1. Name
2. Email
3. Phone
4. Gender: male _____ female _____ other _____
5. Age _____
6. Ethnicity (please identify)
7. Race (please identify)
8. Marital Status

Academic Information

9. Which doctoral program did you graduate from?
10. What year did you enroll in your doctoral program?
11. What year did you graduate from your doctoral program?
12. If applicable, which cohort were you part of?

Background Information

13. What was your family structure growing up (check the one that applies to you the most):

Two parent household _____

Single parent household _____

Raised by caregiver/guardian _____

Other _____

14. During your doctoral program, were you raising a child/children? Were you a caregiver for someone else's children? Were you a caregiver for an elderly person? (check all that applies)

I have children _____

I have no children _____

I was a caregiver/guardian for someone else's children _____

I was a caregiver for an elderly person _____

15. What was your family structure during your doctoral program (check the answer that applies most)

Two parent household _____

Single parent household _____

I do not have children _____

My children did not live with me at the time _____

16. How would you characterize your socioeconomic background while growing up?

Lower Class _____

Middle Class _____

Upper Class _____

17. Your Mother's Education Level:

No College _____

Some College
Bachelor's Degree
Master's Degree
Doctoral Degree
Professional Degree (J.D., M.D., etc.)
I don't know
Mother's Occupation

18. Your Father's Education Level:
No College
Some College
Bachelor's Degree
Master's Degree
Doctoral Degree
Professional Degree (J.D., M.D., etc.)
I don't know
Father's Occupation

Career Information

19. What was your work status during most of your doctoral program?
full-time
part-time
I did not work

20. How many hours a week did you work during your doctoral program?

21. Grit Survey

<http://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/>
grit score:

Appendix B

Doctoral Graduate Questions
Interview Protocol

Research Question 1: What role does grit play, if any, in doctoral completion of students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast?

Interview questions as it relates to RQ 1: Factors that may have caused the doctoral graduate to not complete the dissertation or to graduate.

1. What was the reason that you pursued your doctoral degree?
 - Probe 1: Growing up, did you ever think you would have a doctorate?
2. Did you have to make any personal sacrifices to complete your doctoral studies?
 - a. Probe 2: If so, can you identify those sacrifices and explain how you overcame these challenges?
3. Did personal or professional obligations interfere with your doctoral studies?
 - a. Probe 3: If so, can you describe these obligations and explain how you pushed through them?
4. At any point in your doctoral studies, did you feel like dropping out or taking a break?
 - a. Probe 4: If yes, what was the reason and what was your solution?

Research Question 2: Is goal-setting intrinsic to doctoral completion of students in both the Executive EdD program & the Education, Leadership, Management, and Policy (ELMP) PhD program? *Interview questions as it relates to RQ 2: Motivation to complete their doctorate.*

5. How did you keep motivated to finish your doctorate?
 - a. Probe 5: Can you describe strategies you used?
6. Was finishing your doctorate a major priority for you?
 - a. Probe 6a: If yes, how did you manage your personal and career life to ensure you made time to get your doctoral work done?
 - b. Probe 6b: If no, what other priorities or obligations were more important and why?
7. How did you manage your time to work on your dissertation?

8. What advice would you give a doctoral student struggling to finish their dissertation?

Research Question 3: Is social support influential in the completion of a doctoral degree for students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast? *Interview questions as it relates to RQ 3: Roles that social support played in the life of the doctoral graduate during their dissertation.*

9. In general, were your family and/or significant other supportive of your pursuit of a doctoral degree?
- a. Probe 9a: If yes, how did they show support?
 - b. Probe 9b: If no, do you feel that their non-support had any effect on your doctoral completion?
10. Did you receive social support from anyone in your doctoral program?
- a. Probe 10a: If yes, who did you receive support from and can you describe your experience?
 - b. Probe 10b: If no, would you have wanted their support and how so?
11. Did you ever attend any sort of dissertation study group, workshop, or writing seminar during the research/writing phase of your dissertation?
- a. Probe 11a: If so, describe what you attended and was it helpful?
 - b. Probe 11b: If no, do you think it would have been helpful to you? Explain.

Research Question 4: Does the transition from a class setting to an independent work environment during the dissertation process affect the time it takes to graduate from a doctoral program for students in both an EdD program and a PhD program at a medium-sized university in the Northeast? *Interview questions as it relates to RQ 4: Factors that may arise when working independently.*

12. How did you feel about the transition from taking courses in the classroom to working independently on your research?
- a. Probe 12: Did you enjoy the freedom of working at your pleasure or would you have preferred a more structured setting?

13. Did your work/study habits remain the same after you started your dissertation?
 - a. Probe 13a: If no, what changed? Explain.
 - b. Probe 13b: If yes, what work/study habits were helpful to you?
14. Did you feel that you were adequately prepared to work independently on your dissertation after you passed your comprehensive exam?
 - a. Probe 14: What recommendations, if any, would you suggest to your program to support students when they begin their dissertation?
15. Did you seek out social support to help you get through your independent work stage during your dissertation research?
 - a. Probe 15a: If so, what type of social support did you experience?
 - b. Probe 15b: If no, why not?

Appendix C
IRB Approval
Research Participant Informed Consent Form

AUG 21 2017

Approval Date

Expiration Date

AUG 21 2018



Research Participant Informed Consent Form

The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate in this study. You are eligible to participate because you are a graduate from either the Higher Education, Leadership, Management, Policy Ph.D. program at Seton Hall University or the Executive Educational Ed.D. program at Seton Hall University.

Researcher's Affiliation with Seton Hall University

The researcher is affiliated with Seton Hall University because she is a doctoral candidate in the ELMP Ph.D. program.

Purpose of the Research and Duration

This study is being conducted to identify and analyze the factors associated with the success of completing a doctoral degree. This information is very important in order to aid in understanding how to reduce the high dropout rate of students from doctoral programs (30-50% in certain academic disciplines). You have been selected as a participant in this study, as your input will help in understanding what it is like to persist in a doctoral program. The potential results of the study may help to further improve the quality of the educational doctoral programs at Seton Hall in order to better support the needs of doctoral students. You will potentially benefit from participating in this study by having the opportunity to reflect on your doctoral experience, and discuss the aspects of your doctoral education that have been the most enjoyable and/or useful to you. You are invited to participate in a survey (approximately 15 minutes in length) and an interview (approximately 30 minutes in length) to discuss your experience as a doctoral student.

Procedures

A pre-interview survey will first take place, which includes 20 questions and a Grit Survey. Once the participant completes the survey, a one-on-one interview will follow. The survey and interview will be arranged at the convenience of the participant, either over the phone or in-person at the Seton Hall University campus.

Instruments: Survey and Interview

The pre-interview survey will include demographic questions such as age, gender, race, household composition, professional or employment status, and level of grit. The interview will cover topics such as the participant's doctoral program experience, types of social support received during the participant's doctoral program, and any goal-setting initiatives the participant devised in order to complete their doctoral dissertation. Due to the nature of this study, with permission from the participant, the researcher will take notes and audio record the interview. Only the researcher and participant will have

access to review the notes and listen to the recording from their interview. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed only by the researcher. Participants will be notified when the interview will begin to record. At the conclusion of the interview, the participant will be asked if they wish to listen to their recording to ensure their responses are accurate. The participant may add any additional comments to the audio recording that they feel is necessary.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. During the interview, you will be asked reflective and thought provoking questions. However, you have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview at any time. You also have the right to decline to be audio recorded, stop the audio recording at any time, and erase the audio recording.

Anonymity

Participants will be assigned a pseudonym by the researcher. Any identifying data collected by the researcher will be coded and individual responses will not be linked with participants' identities.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure through the assignment of a pseudonym. A separate list matching participants' names with their pseudonym will be filed and stored electronically on a USB memory key. In addition, the audio recording will only be transcribed by the researcher. The audio recording will be saved onto a USB memory key. All data saved onto the researcher's USB memory key will be kept in a locked, secured office cabinet of the researcher, and destroyed after three years.

Records

All information collected will remain confidential, and only the researcher will be able to link the data to any participant or obtain access to the research records.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits of Participation

Study participants may find that the interviews are enjoyable and provide a unique opportunity to reflect upon their doctoral student experience. The information gained from this study may help the faculty at Seton Hall University, researchers, and other higher education institutions to better understand how to improve their support for doctoral students.

Compensation

No form of compensation will be provided to participants in this study.

**Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board**

AUG 21 2017

Approval Date

Expiration Date

AUG 21 2018

Alternative Procedures

No alternative procedures are available to participate in this study. However, a participant can decline or stop the interview at any time without any risk.

Contact Information

Should you have questions about this research study, you may contact:

Principal Researcher: Valerie Blanchard: valerie.blanchard@student.shu.edu

Dissertation Committee Chair: Dr. Joseph Stetar: (973) 275-2730; joseph.stetar@shu.edu

Director of the Institutional Review Board: Dr. Mary Ruzicka: (973) 313-6314; irb@shu.edu

By signing this consent form you are acknowledging that you read and understand the explanation provided to you in regards to the research project. In addition, you agree that you have had all of your questions answered to your satisfaction and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You will be provided a copy of the signed and dated consent form, and one copy will be kept for study records. Please sign below if you are willing to participate in the study and be audio recorded. You may still participate in the study and not be audio recorded:

I agree to participate in the study:

Participant's Name

Date

I agree to be audio recorded:

Participant's Name

Date

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board

AUG 21 2017

Approval Date

Expiration Date

AUG 21 2018